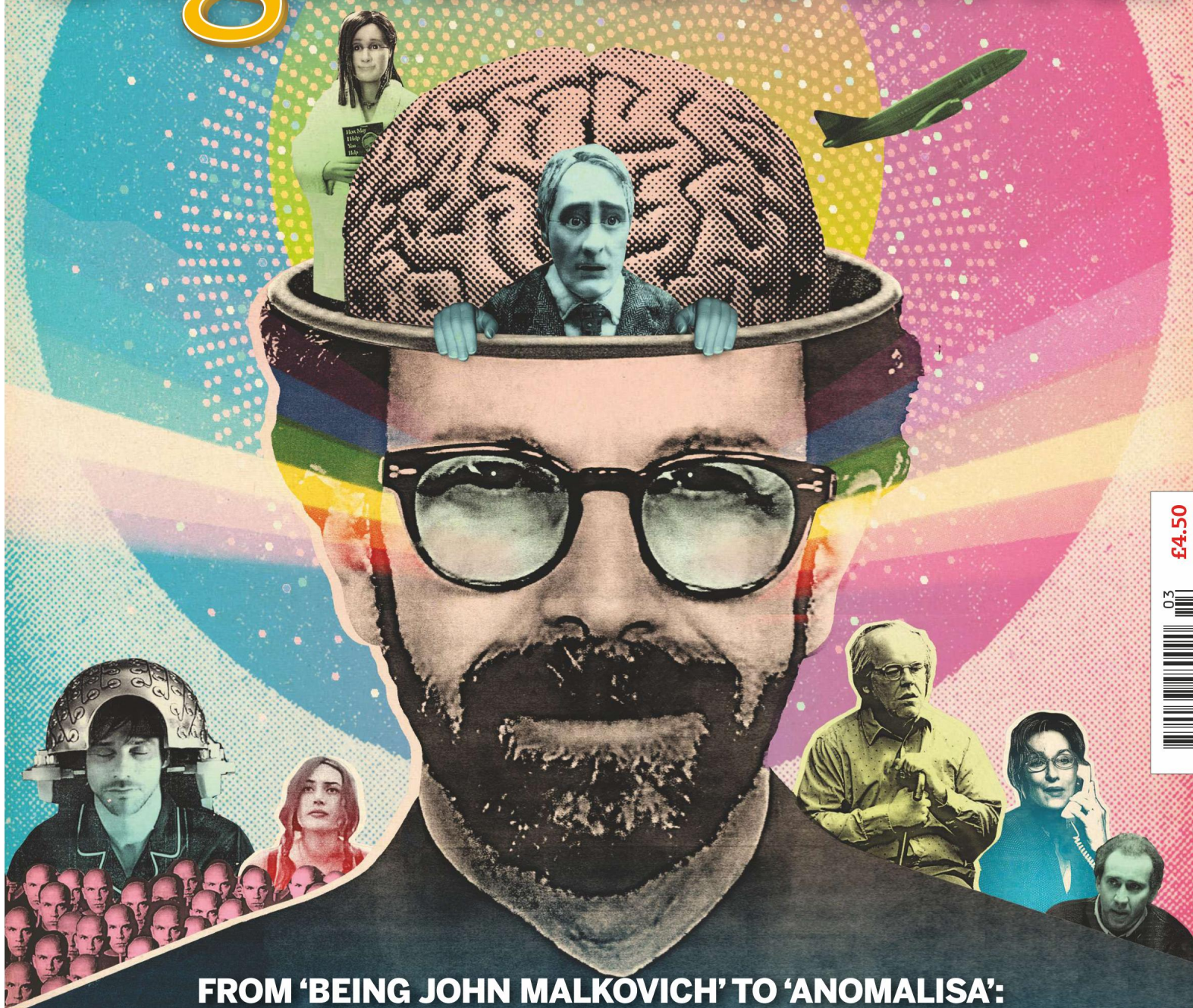


THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE

Sight & Sound



FROM 'BEING JOHN MALKOVICH' TO 'ANOMALISA':
INSIDE THE MIND OF

CHARLIE KAUFMAN

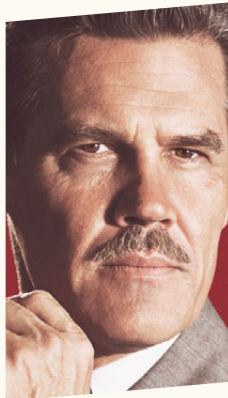
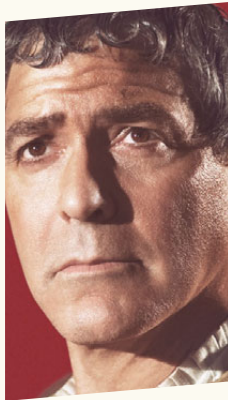
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- LESSONS FROM THE MASTER: 'HITCHCOCK/TRUFFAUT' ● THE CASE OF 'MAKING A MURDERER'
- LUCA GUADAGNINO'S 'A BIGGER SPLASH' ● 'CREED' AND THE RISE OF THE REBOOT

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Island of lost souls

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COVER

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Photograph of Charlie Kaufman

by Gabriel Olsen/Getty Images

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on sale 8 March

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new films



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compulsion
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james white
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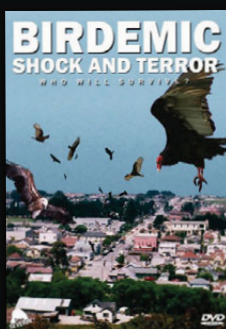
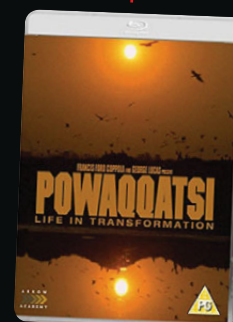


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Editorial Nick James



TERMS OF ENDEARMENT

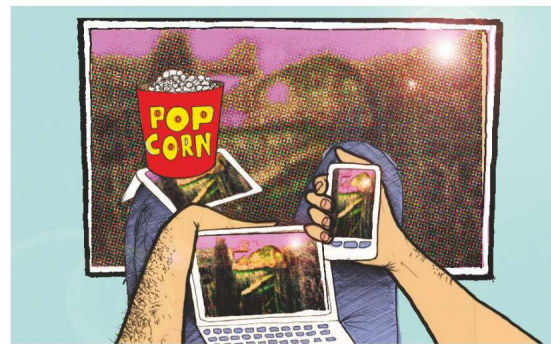
It's a pity the word 'movie' has such a lightweight feel, one that goes back to its casual commercial origins in the early decades of the 20th century. Some US-based critics are happy to use it freely, yet to the British it remains tainted somehow by its historic association with Hollywood box-office striving. While 'film' survives as the prestige word – despite the weight of nostalgia and love it carries for an analogue form that's no longer the industry standard – we could all use a term as accurate, happy and adaptable as 'movie' to cover what, for the sake of this terminological argument, I shall call long-form moving-image art and entertainment. Yet given the multiplicity of ways we now generate and experience moving images, the chances of anyone coining a new term are slim.

There is, of course, a dizzying variety of form and platform. Alongside the cherished ideal of a 35mm (or 70mm) film projection of a film shot on 35mm (or 65mm) in a cinema, there's 'film' that's been shot digitally and projected on DCP and there's Blu-ray and DVD (singly or in box-sets). You can also download a file to your TV or PC, you can pay for a subscription to cable TV or an online video-on-demand service provider, or you can watch via broadcast TV or through many of these providers on your handheld device. Probably there are other means I've missed, but the point is obvious. The moving-image world is the consumer's oyster, no matter the size or grade of the pearl.

According to statistics, when we watch films/movies/works, most of us most of the time watch them on TV. There's a large disparity in number between those relative few who actually go to the cinema and those many who see 'movies' at home. When we learned early this year, for instance, that UK children are now spending more time online than watching TV, it wasn't clear how much of that time on either platform is spent watching movies, but what we do know for certain is that they like watching things on the go. It's probable, therefore, that the crisis this column considered last month – the irony that a glut of foreign-language cinema has led to underexposure and underperformance – will only become more pronounced.

It's no wonder, then, that the dominant players in buying moving-image rights at the recent Sundance Film Festival have not been the likes of the Weinstein Company or even the traditional TV buyer HBO but the home entertainment VOD streaming services Netflix and Amazon. None of the films that won big deals from movie studios at Sundance 2015 did well

There is now a dizzying variety of form and platform. The moving-image world is the consumer's oyster, no matter the size or grade of the pearl



at the US box office. Studio buyers therefore had cold feet before they even got to the ski resort, and many complained that too many of this year's films were pitched further away from popular taste than usual, though their critical reception has been enthusiastic.

Amazon was none the less delighted to pick up rights on such treats as Kenneth Lonergan's *Manchester by the Sea*, Whit Stillman's *Love & Friendship* and Todd Solondz's *Wiener-Dog*; Netflix bought Sian Heder's *Tallulah*, a mother-in-torment drama starring Ellen Page, and *Audrie & Daisy*, a teenage sexual assault documentary. But perhaps the biggest impact the VOD platforms had was when Amazon forced up the price of Nate Parker's reputedly extraordinary slavery revolt picture *The Birth of a Nation* so that Fox Searchlight had to pay \$17.5 million, a Sundance record, to outbid them.

The trade now calls such titles 'originals', singular works to which the VOD streamers are delighted to have certain exclusive rights. A different industry pattern is now taking shape that assumes the natural place to first experience 'originals' is at home – even though filmmakers will continue to insist on theatrical release. This is only a redoubling of the situation that has existed for years, but recently there's been a reluctant recognition that many or most 'originals' will be available at a theatre only for a brief preview or a few 'premiere' festival screenings before the VOD launch. Miguel Gomes's forthcoming *Arabian Nights* trilogy is an interesting UK case in point, being co-released by New Wave in cinemas and MUBI online with a 30-day gap between.

There are ironies here and interesting potential consequences for a magazine like this one. We've seen the successful growth of 'live event' broadcasts of plays and operas in cinemas, which speaks to the oddly distanced relationship viewers now have with the idea of authenticity. These events have little to do with what the words 'film', 'movie' or 'TV' mean, although they enjoy much of the cultural prestige that, say, French cinema once had and would love to regain. The reality, however, is that in a magazine like this, you may in the future only find French films reviewed, not in a film review section but in a VOD home cinema section. ☹

IN THE FRAME

HAIL THE CONQUERING HERO

For a few brief, glittering years Preston Sturges was Hollywood's undisputed master of satire and farce – and he still rules

By Kate Stables

In 1940, Preston Sturges won the first ever Oscar for Best Original Screenplay, for *The Great McGinty*, a caustic political satire he'd sold to Paramount for an unheard-of ten dollars in return for the directing assignment. The concept of the writer-director was born as he crowed: "It's taken me eight years to reach what I wanted. But now, if I don't run out of ideas – and I won't – we'll have some fun. There are some wonderful pictures to be made, and God willing, I will make some of them."

He kept his word. Famously, his finest comedies as a director – his own *Magnificent Seven* – were created in an extraordinarily prolific five-year stretch between 1939 and 1944 that saw *The Great McGinty* swiftly followed by *Christmas in July*, *The Lady Eve*, *Sullivan's Travels*, *The Palm Beach Story*, *The Miracle of Morgan's Creek* and *Hail the Conquering Hero*. Fast-talking farces and crowded, knockabout satires, their



The king of comedy: Preston Sturges



ON OUR
RADAR

Unexpected Eisenstein

Discover another side to legendary Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein with this exhibition of 70 of his unseen drawings at GRAD Gallery, London, from 17 February – 30 April. On show will be preparatory drawings for films such as 'Ivan the Terrible' (1945), as well as drawings influenced by the writings of British authors such as Lewis Carroll, D.H. Lawrence and Arthur Conan Doyle.



Borderlines Film Festival

Thirty venues across Herefordshire host this innovative rural film festival (26 February – 13 March). As well as previews of forthcoming releases, the programme features a Tarkovsky retrospective, a Romany cinema strand, a focus on rural and landscape films – including David Gladwell's cult classic 'Requiem for a Village' (1975, right) – and tributes to Terence Davies and cinematographer Billy Williams.



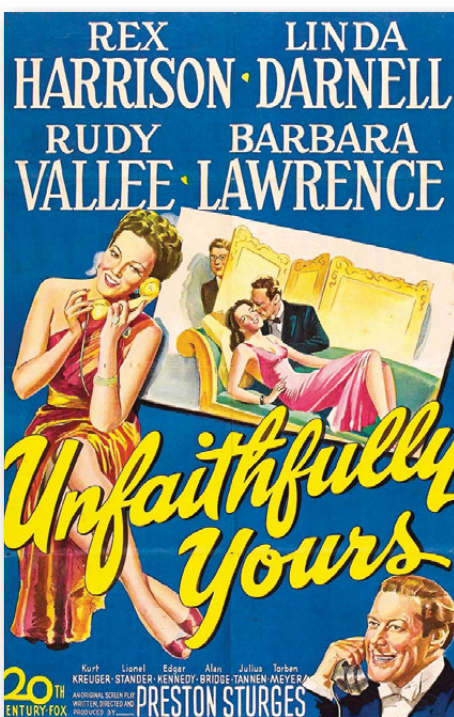
verbal wit leavened with pratfalls, they share a rollicking pace, and a mocking, bracingly unsentimental view of American life.

However, this burst of brilliance has overshadowed the fact that Sturges's screen comedy was cracklingly distinctive from his earliest screenwriting days. There are unexpectedly rich pickings available in the work that bookends this classic streak, much of it on show in the BFI season 'Unfaithfully Yours: The Comedies of Preston Sturges', which runs through February and March this year.

From the outset, Sturges specialised in what Peter Bogdanovich called "fresh, unusually vigorous scripts, which quite overpowered their directors". Indeed, Sturges's proudly sole-authored script deal for the heavyweight drama *The Power and the Glory* (1933) was revolutionary, as was producer Jesse Lasky's order to William K. Howard to shoot it verbatim. Despite its earnest playing, this time-shifting, flashback-filled tale of the ascent of Spencer Tracy's ruthless railroad tycoon (which prefigured *Citizen Kane*) shows how versatile Sturges could be as a dramatist. So does the sparkling *Easy Living* (1937) which gives us the flipside of a tycoon's travails, this time as screwball comedy, pinballing adorable innocent Jean Arthur on a pavement-to-penthouse journey of misunderstandings triggered by a fallen fur coat. Director Mitchell Leisen's elegant, overwrought aesthetic (that ornate white wonderland of an apartment) nimbly sets off Sturges's cynical class-clash comedy, and makes the film's sweet slapstick (an automat food-fight, Arthur and Ray Milland sliding like wet puppies around a giant, squirting bathtub) resonate.

Prominent in these 30s screenplays are themes that Sturges would go on honing into the 40s – strong, independent female leads, rags-to-riches stories with capricious benefactors, spiky social satire. Though it's notionally a romantic comedy, *Remember the Night* (1939) is full of unexpected genre and tonal shifts, a try-out for the bolder complications of *Sullivan's Travels*. Barbara Stanwyck's smart-mouthed shoplifter, dragged home for Christmas by dogged DA Fred MacMurray, displays the deftness of *The Lady Eve*'s seductive trickster. But the film blends road-trip screwball with a dark detour to her monstrous mother, and an engagingly – and uncharacteristically – warm outcome. Nonetheless, Sturges, irritated by Leisen's ruthless pruning of his script to lend MacMurray a quiet decency, resolved to run his own show.

Cut to the late 1940s, when Sturges's biting



originality no longer found a warm welcome from studios or audiences. His black comedy *Unfaithfully Yours* (1948), about the murderous fantasies of a cuckolded conductor, was a box-office flop. Yet it's a glorious, ambitious confection, sardonic about high art, low impulses and the gag-strewn gap between Rex Harrison's fierce revenge daydreams (cleverly modelled to the respective rhythms of Rossini, Wagner and Tchaikovsky) and the slapstick reality.

If his reign was short, Sturges's reach is long. His influence surfaces today in the sophisticated wordplay of Wes Anderson and in Quentin Tarantino's delight in American demotic speech. His main heirs, however, are the Coen brothers, reworking his themes with stern originality from the flat-out farce of *Raising Arizona* (1987) through the nebbish's ascent of *The Hudsucker Proxy* (1994) and the outright homage of *O Brother, Where Art Thou?* (2000). What's the betting that their upcoming 50s-set Hollywood comedy *Hail, Caesar!* will be a sly satire that evokes the master? But with a little sex in it. **S**

i **The Lady Eve and The Palm Beach Story** have extended runs as part of a Sturges season at BFI Southbank, London, which is on until 16 March

LISTOMANIA 21ST-CENTURY WESTERNS

With *Slow West*, *The Revenant*, *The Hateful Eight* and now *Bone Tomahawk* (see page 64) riding high, we head west to dig out other recent gems

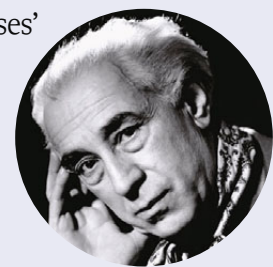
- 1** **Open Range** (2003)
Kevin Costner
- 2** **Deadwood** (2004-06)
David Milch
- 3** **Brokeback Mountain** (2005)
Ang Lee
- 4** **The Three Burials of Melquiades Estrada** (2005)
Tommy Lee Jones
- 5** **The Assassination of Jesse James by the Coward Robert Ford** (2007)
Andrew Dominik
- 6** **Meek's Cutoff** (2010)
Kelly Reichardt
- 7** **True Grit** (2010)
Ethan Coen, Joel Coen
- 8** **Rango** (2011, below)
Gore Verbinski
- 9** **Django Unchained** (2012)
Quentin Tarantino
- 10** **Jauja** (2014)
Lisandro Alonso



QUOTE OF THE MONTH ABEL GANCE

'Cinema is not just pictures. Films are something great, mysterious and sublime, for which one should not fail to risk one's life if the need arises'

A new digitally restored version of **Gance's *Napoléon* (1927)** will be released by the BFI in the autumn



CRIME: Hong Kong Style

Manchester's HOME focuses on Hong Kong crime thrillers in this season running from February to April (with a selection from the programme also showing at the Barbican, London, in March). Classic tales of rogue cops ('Infernal Affairs', right), epic mobster dramas ('To Be Number One'), slapstick comedies ('The Pilferers' Progress') and lesser-known gangster sagas ('Portland Street Blues') all feature in a selection that spans films from the 60s to the present day.



AV Festival

George Orwell's account of working-class life 'The Road to Wigan Pier' is the inspiration for the next two editions of the biennial festival, taking place in venues across Newcastle and Gateshead. This year's programme, 'Meanwhile, what about socialism?' (27 February – 27 March), includes radical British political documentaries, a focus on Ukrainian nonfiction, and a new live soundtrack by Test Dept for Mikhail Kaufman's rediscovered 1931 silent documentary 'An Unprecedented Campaign' (right).



WALKING TALL

From *The Wizard of Oz* to the *Before...* trilogy, cinema is rife with movies that can be seen as constituting a genre of their own – walking films



By Mark Cousins

We have 'talkies', maybe we should have 'walkies'. Three of the movie genres are focused on guns – gangster pictures,

westerns and war movies (it's as if the genres were devised by men...) – yet we walk more than we shoot. Refugees walk, city dwellers walk. People do it to get to work, to exercise, to protest, to think, to be spiritual, to be with others or alone. As well as shooting, we have genres about singing, loving and fearing. It's time we thought about walking films as a kind of genre.

There are loads of them. To start with the present, it's hard to imagine Aaron Sorkin films without walking. His walkie talkies trace the corridors of power. Jump backwards to the earliest days of the movies and you find Eadweard Muybridge setting lines of cameras to capture perambulation, its bilateral, double-swinging pendulum gate. Silent cinema's discovery of one of its USPs, the close-up, meant filmmakers were less obsessed with the full body in motion, though Chaplin's heel-led, toes-turned-out walk was one of the most recognisable images of the early 20th century.

The 1930s, the decade that started with Gandhi's great salt protest march, ended with a girl and three imaginary friends walking through her Möbius-strip dream. *The Wizard of Oz* (1939) has been so categorised in other ways that we don't think of it as one of the great founding walking films, establishing as it did a range of genre thematics: the camaraderie of the road; the visual pleasure of the passing scene; the unravelling, or discovery, of self that happens in the picaresque.

The 1950s, the decade of Marilyn Monroe's "Jell-O on springs" walk in *Some Like It Hot* (1959), saw movie technology and European philosophy combine to enrich the walking genre. As film screens widened beyond the 4:3 ratio, they became more horizontal, thereby showing the space where the walker had been and where she was going. Lighter 16mm equipment meant more DPs filmed from their shoulders, walking as they did so, to follow a human subject who was also, often, walking. And the cult of Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre, for example, led to a new type of human in the popular mind, the existential man. Derived from Rousseau's writings and echoed in Walter Benjamin's, this man set off alone, or with one un-soul mate, to experience solitude and reflect. The westerns of Anthony Mann and Budd Boetticher were driven by such men, but many of the great existential walkers in cinema were women: Corinne Marchand in Agnès Varda's *Cléo from 5 to 7* (1962), Jenny Agutter in Nicolas Roeg's *Walkabout* (1970), Koda Yukiko in Naruse Mikio's beautiful *Floating Clouds* (1955) – one of the great films about walking after war – and Hidari



Sachiko in Imamura Shohei's astonishing *The Insect Woman* (1963). In time – and especially after Guy Debord introduced the idea of the *dérive*, the drifting walk against the grain of the commercial city – the existential walk would acquire political undertones. It was escaping capitalism.

In the 1960s, George A. Romero made the stumbling, inexorable zombie walk political, too, and his *Dawn of the Dead* (1978) suggested that Western consumerism is a zombie walk. The horror genre and the cinema of fear were great at walking. Think of Yul Brynner's exterminating robot in *Westworld* (1973) and, coming up to date, the slow stalk of *It Follows* (2014).

The young man in 'Journey to the West' seems out of time, as can walking itself, and as we watch we perhaps think of Muybridge

In the 1970s, Travis Bickle drove a taxi, but one of the things we remember most about him is that walk towards the camera at the start of Martin Scorsese's film. Brian De Palma said one of his favourite things to do was to film women walking. The invention of the Steadicam in 1975 made this more possible, and enriched the walking genre. Alan Clarke's *Elephant* (1988) was one of the first to see how the Steadicam allowed a whole film to be built around the prowling, the tracking assassin. Gus Van Sant's reworking of the film again made walking hypnotic, numbing and deadly. The same director's *Gerry* (2001), in which two men do almost nothing but walk, drew from the great walking scenes in Béla Tarr films, stripped story and logic down to a minimum, and so made walking into something almost abstract, like the end of 2001: *A Space Odyssey* (1968).

To say this is to bring up the spiritual aspects of walking. Most religions have pilgrimages in

which walkers endure and suffer in order to evince their love of god. In Alfred Hitchcock's most religious film, *I Confess* (1953), Montgomery Clift is constantly walking. Souleymane Cissé's extraordinary *Yeelen* (1987) is about a young man who undergoes a series of existential and mythic encounters as he walks. And Tsai Ming-liang's *Journey to the West* (2014) anatomises another young man – perhaps a Buddhist monk – as he walks, ultra slowly, across Marseille. He seems out of time, as can walking itself, and as we watch we perhaps think of Muybridge. Tilda Swinton and I called our 2009 trek across Scotland showing films 'A Pilgrimage' because the trip, on which we pulled a mobile cinema on wheels, was our way of showing our love of movies.

And if movie walkers were to have a patron saint, we could do worse than name him Werner Herzog. As well as making great films about walking such as *Aguirre, Wrath of God* (1972), he famously walked around the border of Albania, and later went from Munich to Paris on foot, with the idea that his effort would, in itself, defer the death of film historian Lotte Eisner.

Tsai's film and Herzog's trek perhaps pushed the cinema-walking affinity as far as it could go, but if you loop the metaphysics of both back into a more social realm, you get two movie trilogies of lasting power and impact. I've written here before about the films of Iranian director Mohammad-Ali Talebi. In his film *The Boot* (1992), a young boy walks around Tehran looking for the lost boot of a little girl. In *Bag of Rice* (1996), another girl treks across the same city to help an old lady get a bag of rice. In a third film, *Willow and Wind* (2000), a boy who has broken a pane of glass in school goes on a long, dangerous walk to a glazier and back, to fix the pane. All three are grounded in simple acts of walking, and are about real children, not saints, yet each is a kind of Camino de Santiago.

And then there's Richard Linklater's *Before...* trilogy. Julie Delpy and Ethan Hawke meet on a train. They decide to get off it, then walk through a city, through the night. Years later, they meet in another city. He's written a novel about their night, their walk. And then they have kids. Steadicam walks structure their meetings, their three present tenses. Each step makes the previous one past. Their walks are pendulums, metronomes, second hands. Their lives tick away as they try to analyse them, not be bewildered by them.

Maybe that's what's happening to Alida Valli at the end of *The Third Man* (1949), on that long walk towards the camera. Maybe she's counting. Tick tock. Maybe she's not debating with herself, after all, about whether she should live her life with good, dependable Holly Martins (Joseph Cotten). Maybe she's more like Travis at the start of *Taxi Driver*, on the busy Manhattan street, so in the moment that he seems to have a lapse of consciousness as the image dissolves forward. He loses himself for a moment, and maybe she does too. That's why we walk. That's why we go to movies. 📍

i Mark Cousins has made four walking films: *What Is This Film Called Love?*, *Here Be Dragons*, and the forthcoming *I Am Belfast* and *Stockholm My Love*

THE FIVE KEY...

PUPPET ROMANCES

Looking for romance with no strings attached? Wondering what gloves have got to do with it? You need our guide to puppet love

By Michael Brooke

Soon to be seen blossoming in Charlie Kaufman's *Anomalisa* (see page 24), the puppet romance is an artform far more ancient than cinema, and the comparative rarity of its appearances in feature-length films not primarily aimed at children reveals how difficult it is to bring off convincingly, given the need to imbue artificial dummies with recognisable human emotions. Hilarious though *Team America: World Police*'s gratuitous puppet-sex scene is, it clearly does not belong in this company, and neither do the warped fantasies of Jan Svankmajer (despite his degree in puppetry) – although *The Sound of Music*'s lonely goatherd offers potential for an Aardman-style spin-off.



1 A Midsummer Night's Dream (1959)

Arguably the puppet film's supreme master, Czech filmmaker Jirí Trnka combined old-fashioned craftsmanship (his puppets would be at home on a marionette stage) with exquisitely nuanced stop-motion animation, seen to best effect in this Shakespeare adaptation, which runs the romantic gamut from the spiritual to the earthly comic, with such visual eloquence that the soundtrack is almost superfluous.



2 The Muppets Take Manhattan (1984)

The long-running romance between Miss Piggy and Kermit the Frog is my generation's *Romeo and Juliet*, although without the tragic consequences. But there are alarming wobbles on the way to their climactic wedding, not least the intervention of a potential love rival – but surely Kermit isn't really going to prefer a mere human to the magnificently karate-chopping, roller-skating alternative?



3 The Double Life of Véronique (1991)

A different type of romance, in an otherwise live-action film. The love affair here is between the puppet and her creator/manipulator, who is visible throughout, cajoling and caressing her into an extraordinarily rich, nuanced performance which culminates in her death and butterfly-like resurrection: a microcosm of much of the rest of Krzysztof Kieslowski's film in just one scene.



4 Bride of Chucky (1998)

Even psychopathic killer dolls have feelings, and this overtly comic successor to the more straightforward horror of the *Child's Play* trilogy pairs Chucky up with Tiffany (a fellow doll possessed by the spirit of a serial killer's girlfriend) for a Bonnie and Clyde-style kidnapping spree. Their aim is to restore themselves to human form – but the puppet versions are much more fun.



5 Corpse Bride (2005)

For all the ghoulish trappings of most of his films, Tim Burton has always been a soppy romantic at bottom, and his still-beating heart is very much on his sleeve. The story here concerns an accidental marriage between the living and the dead – the consequence of a misplaced wedding ring – which results in a bizarre but strangely convincing love triangle involving a man, a woman and a sentient female corpse.

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FILTHY

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SARAH KURCHAK, CONSEQUENCE OF SOUND

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STEPHEN FINGLETON

The director of *The Survivalist* talks about his post-apocalyptic vision of the future and the pressures of using the term 'science fiction'

By Wendy Ide

All three of the central characters in *The Survivalist*, writer/director Stephen Fingleton's arresting feature debut, are, he explains, "serial killers". The fact that they are still alive, in a post-apocalyptic near-future in which society and humanity has collapsed, means that they have blood on their hands. Like much in this taut story, the fact that each of them will probably kill again is acknowledged but unspoken. Fingleton directs with a confidently economic vision, honed through a clutch of acclaimed short films. In the central role of the *Survivalist*, a loner eking out a subsistence on a patch of land deep in a forest, Martin McCann brings a nervy, animal restlessness. He forms an uneasy accord with a mother and daughter (Olwen Fouéré, Mia Goth) after they barter sex for shelter. Their lives are in constant jeopardy, both from the bands of raiders who roam the country, and from an insidious threat closer to home. Rather than man versus nature, the theme here is man versus human nature.

Wendy Ide: You don't have much hope for civilisation do you?

Stephen Fingleton: The film is ultimately hopeful. My belief in the future is that we won't have advanced technological civilisations. We will have aboriginal civilisations. I follow [scientist and author] Jared Diamond on this. The particular premium on certain types of intelligence that our civilisation has fostered may not be evolutionarily advantageous. So that may change who we are. We might return into the unthinking soup.

WI: Do you feel there is an inevitability to this?

SF: Oh, it's completely inevitable. I was in Rome last year, walking around the Palatine, and you study that civilisation and they really did think, like the Greeks and the Egyptians before, that their society would live forever. While people have an extraordinarily poor ability to bet when things will go wrong, I don't think it's particularly downbeat to say that in the long term, the society we have is not sustainable and will not exist.

WI: With that in mind, why create art if it is all going to be redundant?

SF: It's an interesting conundrum. For film, there is a particular resonance because we are in an era when everything is moving on to hard disks rather than film formats. We might enter a new era of lost movies. So I often think about it. The working solution I have come up with is, 'To express is to be.'

WI: There is a fascination in cinema with life after the collapse of society. There are numerous teen dystopia movies but also pictures like *Stalker* and *The Road*. Did you refer to any?

SF: Yes, *Stalker* was the main influence. It was what Tarkovsky called an 'anti-science-fiction film'. It was trying to minimise and go against the tropes of a science-fiction film as much as possible, while utilising the unique space, this



Killer instinct: Martin McCann in the title role of *The Survivalist*

fantastic realm that it creates. From the distributor or the sales agent's point of view, it's quite complicated. You say 'science fiction', and there are things that people want. Even identifying that our film was in the future was a big decision in pre-production. There are ways we could have designed the film to make it unclear when it was set. But ultimately it was more interesting to make it clear, perhaps because of audience participation, thinking that this is in their future.

WI: What were the main challenges you faced in making this as a first feature?

SF: It was intended as something that I could self-finance. But when I wrote the script, it coincided with me maturing as a writer, and creating something that could attract cast and talent. Once you get above a certain threshold of money, something happens and the 'professionals' are brought in. All the techniques you know for how to save money, from guerrilla filmmaking, not only are they no longer useful, they are

My belief in the future is that we won't have advanced technological civilisations. We will have aboriginal civilisations



Less talk, more action: Stephen Fingleton

viewed as a challenge to the perceived correct way to make a film. I guess the main challenge is that for me, there is no separation between producing and directing. Yet there is a perception that there is a line in the sand where my job ends and production begins, and my influence should wane. What I learned is that the more I can influence the production process, the more I can help the outcome of the film.

WI: I liked the fact that there is so little overt backstory to the characters. It's as though their humanity has been whittled away and all that's left is the moment to moment survival.

SF: What I wanted to do was show the shape of the world from how it had deformed the characters. So you see people who acknowledge to each other that all communication is manipulation in a world like this. We actually had a scene where they described their backstory – we filmed it. And it included one of my favourite lines in the film: "What were you, when people were things?" We removed it and made the whole section silent because the value of silence was much more useful in the film.

WI: With the lack of dialogue comes a focus on sound. How did you approach the sound design?

SF: From the beginning, I said that there was not going to be any music in the film, and that the score was going to be the sound of the world. Unlike many post-'event' films, this is set in a world where nature is abundant and it is just humankind that has declined. So less talk, more bird chatter. I was influenced by documentaries on Chernobyl, which show how nature thrives when humanity disappears. So with my sound designer, we found ways of introducing musical elements into the story. That's where the harmonica came from. I'm a Sergio Leone fan and my character is a man with no name, so it was very suitable. **S**

i **The Survivalist** is released in UK cinemas on 12 February and is reviewed on page 86

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BRINGING UP BABY

The pram is emblematic of both the vulnerability of an infant, and the disproportionate physical and psychic space it occupies



By Hannah McGill

"There is no more sombre enemy of good art than the pram in the hall," goes Cyril Connolly's oft-quoted maxim. And yet a pram

rattling down a flight of steps can really get an audience going... The Odessa steps sequence in *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) is more often analysed for its technique than its symbolism – and clearly, its imperilled baby carriage is a technical device, providing the scene with a source of pace and suspense while also maximising the emphasis on individual suffering that ensures its emotional impact. But the pram has its own significance as an object, implying not only the removal of all safety under the brutal Tsarist regime, but also the idea that safety itself can only be an infantile delusion in an unequal society. Revolution demands that we all be shaken out of padded complacency; the safety of babies, like the security of a social hierarchy, is a potential casualty of radical change.

The pram effectively replaces some of the functions provided by the mother's body during pregnancy: protection and conveyance of the infant. It can therefore take on a sinister aspect, insofar as it represents the mother's loss of control and rights over her child. The poster image for *Rosemary's Baby* (1968) – a black pram balanced atop sinister rocks – communicates not so much that the small occupant is in danger, *Potemkin*-style, but that he is beyond the reach of maternal care or influence. Just as Rosemary's horrible experience of pregnancy reverses the customary onscreen sentimentalisation of that state, so the film's final, disturbing turnaround – whereby Rosemary notes her baby's infernal attributes, but succumbs to her maternal instincts nonetheless – communicates a deep taboo: the capacity of parenthood to alter personalities and warp judgement. That Rosemary's baby is concealed within a black-draped crib is not only a respectful adherence to the traditional exhortation not to show the monster (one that was initially resisted by the film's producer, habitual monster-shower William Castle): it also emphasises that the individual characteristics of the baby don't matter to Rosemary in her new role. She is transformed into a mother, and her job is to love whatever the hood of the crib conceals. As pregnancy removed her physical autonomy, so motherhood now ousts her moral discernment.

And if a mother should insist on retaining such rebellious individual characteristics? She may be rewarded with an experience like that of the mother in *We Need to Talk About Kevin* (2010), who is punished luridly for her refusal to be stereotypically starry-eyed about her infant. Kevin's pram – no less than the deadly prop one featured in *Marathon Man* (1976) – contains a bomb, timed to go off when



The poster for Polanski's *Rosemary's Baby* (1968)

Kevin reaches adolescence and commits mass murder. Eva's willful deafness to her son's more complex needs is signalled in the blackly comic scene in which she stands his pram next to a pounding pneumatic drill, to get a moment's respite from his crying. This idea of a pram concealing a monster is given even more gleefully

The image of a man pushing a pram has remained movie shorthand for the emasculating compromises of fatherhood



literal expression in Peter Jackson's *Braindead* (1992), in which a savage zombie baby must be secured in his pram with barbed wire.

As in real life, however, attentive and adoring parents get punished too. In *Gone with the Wind* (1939), Rhett Butler's willingness to take the maternal role by pushing his baby daughter's pram emphasises his devotion to her, as does the sheer vulgar extravagance of the vehicle, which is kitted out as a miniature horse and carriage. Yet this is also a singularly bitter joke, foreshadowing as it does Rhett's inability to protect Bonnie Blue from her death in a riding accident. The image of a man pushing a pram has remained movie shorthand for the enriching but inevitably emasculating compromises of fatherhood. By the time of *Three Men and a Cradle* (1987), the idea of men taking significant responsibility for baby care was still *outré* enough to constitute a whole plot idea; and a quarter-century later, *What to Expect When You're Expecting* (2012) got significant comic mileage and a whole poster image from prams manned by men.

The treatment of early parenthood in the movies is a peculiar mix of sentimental veneration and fastidious dismissiveness – the latter attitude identifiable not only on screen, but also on set, where unforgiving hours and a culture of competitive overwork notoriously disadvantage those parents of young children who care about seeing their offspring. A movie baby is a version of the 'odd monster' conjured by Virginia Woolf in her analysis of women in literary culture, *A Room of One's Own*: "A worm winged like an eagle"; a thing once worshipped and scorned. The pram – emblematic as it is of both the vulnerability of an infant, and the disproportionate physical and psychic space it occupies – has provided useful cinematic shorthand for this dichotomy. The pram contains the threat, literally, but also lends it bulk – and potentially horrifying momentum. ☹



(Clockwise) *Battleship Potemkin*, *Gone with the Wind*, *What to Expect...*, and *We Need to Talk About Kevin*

ETTORE SCOLA, 1931-2016

The Oscar-nominated – and perpetually modest – screenwriter, director and prime exponent of ‘comedy Italian style’

By Pasquale Iannone

Ettore Scola would have been assured a place at Italian cinema's top table by his early screenwriting career alone, but it was his work as a director that brought him to international prominence, winning prizes at major film festivals and gaining Oscar nominations for pictures such as *A Special Day* (*Una giornata particolare*, 1977) and *The Family* (*La famiglia*, 1987). Although he worked in several genres, he became identified with the *commedia all'italiana* ('comedy Italian style'), a group of films that took satirical swipes at both contemporary Italian society and historical events – everything from the Middle Ages to the Fascist era and World War II.

Born near the southern Italian city of Avellino in 1931, Scola began contributing to the satirical magazine *Marc'Aurelio* while still in his mid-teens. The magazine famously provided a launch pad for many an artistic career, including that of Federico Fellini, who was more than a decade Scola's senior.

His first, uncredited forays into screenwriting involved contributing gags and set pieces to a range of comedies. By the early 1950s his reputation had grown considerably, to the point where he was one of Italian cinema's most in-demand writers. He soon became a regular collaborator with the directors Antonio Pietrangeli and Dino Risi, often in tandem with fellow writer Ruggero Maccari. Scola and Maccari worked on several Pietrangeli dramas, including *Adua and Her Friends* (1960) and *I Knew Her Well* (1965), while for Risi they wrote for comedies such as *Il sorpasso* (1962) and *I mostri* (1963). It's interesting to note just how unlike many of his contemporaries Scola was as a young man. Not only was he perfectly content with screenwriting and had no desperate urge to direct, but he also had no interest in railing against those who had gone before. Having worked so closely with the older generation of filmmakers had no doubt increased his respect for them.

His first step behind the camera was the episodic Vittorio Gassman vehicle *Let's Talk About Women* (1964). Though the picture received a lukewarm reception from critics, its considerable success at the box office allowed Scola to embark quickly on his second film, the comic caper *Hard Times for Princes* (*La congiuntura*, 1964), once again starring Gassman, this time opposite British Hollywood star Joan Collins. Another notable 1960s title was *Will Our Heroes Be Able to Find Their Friend Who Has Mysteriously Disappeared in Africa?* (1968), which finds Fausto (Alberto Sordi) setting off for Angola in search of his brother-in-law Titino (Nino Manfredi).

From the early 1970s, Scola started to attract greater critical acclaim. At the beginning of the decade he made *Jealousy Italian Style* (*Dramma della gelosia*, 1970), a formally daring comic melodrama set among the Roman working class,



No desperate urge to direct: the surprisingly prolific Ettore Scola

featuring Monica Vitti as a florist torn between a middle-aged bricklayer (Marcello Mastroianni) and a young pizza chef (Giancarlo Giannini). Scola reteamed with Mastroianni a year later for the US-set *My Name Is Rocco Papaleo* (1971) before making the chamber piece *The Most Wonderful Evening of My Life* (1972) with an impressive Franco-Italian cast that included Sordi, Michel Simon, Pierre Brasseur and Charles Vanel.

Between 1974 and 1977, Scola made three of his most important works: *We All Loved Each Other So Much* (aka *Those Were the Years*, 1974), *Down and Dirty* (1976) and *A Special Day* (1977). The first of these tells of three male friends (played

by Gassman, Manfredi and Stefano Satta Flores) who, after fighting together as partisans during WWII, go on to lead very different lives in the post-war era. The Fellini-esque *Down and Dirty* won Scola the Best Director prize at Cannes – in the year when Tennessee Williams presided over the jury – and revolves around a large, impoverished Roman family headed by irascible patriarch Giacinto (Manfredi). *A Special Day* saw Scola rein himself in, moving away from comedy and satire to focus on just two characters – a housewife (Sophia Loren) and a radio announcer (Mastroianni) – who, despite their different political leanings, form an unlikely bond against the backdrop of Hitler's 1938 visit to Rome.

Scola remained prolific during the 80s, moving regularly between features and documentaries. At the end of the decade he made *Splendor* (1988) and *What Time Is It?* (1989), two films starring Mastroianni and the young Neapolitan actor Massimo Troisi.

Understandably, in the 90s and 2000s he started to slow down, announcing his retirement from filmmaking in 2011. Two years later, he directed one more film, *How Strange to Be Named Federico* (2013), a tribute to his friend Fellini on the 20th anniversary of his death. Scola co-wrote with his daughters Paola and Silvia who, in 2015, released a documentary about their father's life called *Laughing and Joking*. "I'm quite lazy," Scola told *La Repubblica*'s Maria Pia Fusco with typical modesty around the time of the film's release. "That's why the job I enjoyed most was screenwriting. It was Vittorio Gassman who persuaded me to become a director, a job for a liar: you have to pretend to know everything..."

It was Vittorio Gassman who persuaded me to become a director, a job for a liar: you have to pretend to know everything...



Sophia Loren in *A Special Day* (1977)



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DEVELOPMENT TALE

PRIDE AND PREJUDICE AND ZOMBIES



Stabs and stabbability: the martial-arts-trained Bennett sisters in *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*

It is a truth universally acknowledged that a Jane Austen-zombie crossover can be a hard sell to potential producers

By Charles Gant

Seth Grahame-Smith's genre mash-up *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* was first published in April 2009. Its unusual blend of Regency romantic drama and undead plague action soon attracted interest in a film adaptation. Natalie Portman and her producing partner Annette Savitch identified the property as a potential starring role for the actress, and took the project to Lionsgate, which seemed an appropriate fit, given the company's indie drama and genre heritage. Production president Allison Shearmur initially passed – “I wrestled with it because I found it to be so much more successful as a blend of Jane Austen characters and situations and themes with the zombies than I was prepared to admit, but my own prejudice kept me from optioning the book” – but then changed her mind two months later, calling Portman.

By then, Portman and Savitch's Handsomecharlie Films was talking to Sean McKittrick and Edward Hamm's Darko Entertainment (*Jimi: All Is by My Side*) about funding the adaptation. “Your timing is not great,” Portman politely told Shearmur, who

nevertheless persuaded them to let Lionsgate pay for the option and contribute 50 per cent towards development of the screenplay.

First up to bat was David O. Russell, with whom Shearmur had worked on two projects at her previous job at Paramount. But, she says, “He very quickly became involved with *The Fighter* and *Silver Linings Playbook*, and he was never fully available to stay with the project.” Next came Mike White, who boarded in November 2010 and exited two months later to focus on his HBO TV series *Enlightened*. In February 2011, Craig Gillespie (*Lars and the Real Girl*) stepped on board, bringing on as screenwriter Marti Noxon, with whom he had just worked on his *Fright Night* remake. By October that year it was announced that the director had left the film.

The voices at Lionsgate that supported the project experienced a setback when, in June 2012, *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Hunter*, a similar genre mash-up also adapted from a Grahame-Smith novel, landed in cinemas. Critics branded it a creative misfire, audiences stayed away, and the film achieved a weak domestic gross of just \$38 million, from a budget of \$69 million. (The failure of *Cowboys & Aliens* in the summer of 2011, says Shearmur, was viewed within Lionsgate as less relevant to its own project.) Meanwhile, *Zombies* lost its chief advocate when Lionsgate acquired Summit (the *Twilight* series) in January 2012, promoting the latter's principal creative executive Erik Feig to Shearmur's post,

and transitioning her into an external producer deal. Rights to the book were allowed to lapse.

As Shearmur explains, “The reason the option lapsed at Lionsgate is there was always an internal disagreement between those who could see it as a movie and those who could not. There was a group of people who believed that it was not *Abraham Lincoln: Vampire Slayer*. They believed there was a character-driven story, with real emotional stakes, and scenes that were relevant to the zombies, that as a combination could work, and there were others who did not. It was difficult to get everybody to all agree on this one. I have sympathy as an ex-studio executive, when you are dealing with a very original tonal proposition, it is hard to get everybody to see the same film.”

Then, in March 2013, the cavalry arrived in the form of Megan Ellison's Annapurna Pictures – or rather its production, finance and international sales entity Panorama. “It's one of those calls you dream about,” Shearmur says. Panorama president Marc Butan said he wanted to reoption the book, develop a new screenplay and make the movie. “He saw the commercial appeal of it,” explains Shearmur. “He really liked the blending of the genres. And he was unwavering.”

By now, Savitch had left Portman's company to join Paramount Television, and Portman herself was focusing on her directorial debut *A Tale of Love and Darkness*, but both remained on board as producers alongside Butan and McKittrick. Butan suggested bringing Shearmur

in as a fellow producer. A new creative principal for the project very quickly materialised when she collided with the director Burr Steers (*Igby Goes Down*) when they were both dropping off their children at elementary school. Steers said, "There's a project of yours I've always loved," and arranged to stop by her office and pitch his creative execution. Brian Oliver, from well-resourced Cross Creek (*Black Swan*, *Black Mass*), later boarded, rounding out the producer team.

Meanwhile, the Hollywood landscape was beginning to look more welcoming for this story, in which the Bennett sisters, having trained in Chinese martial arts, display impressive fighting prowess. While Zack Snyder's misfiring *Sucker Punch* had soured studios on female-driven action in 2011, the tide was now turning in its favour with *The Hunger Games* and *Divergent*.

Creatively, while the Noxon/Gillespie version of the script was "a bit more plot-driven and a little less-Austen driven", Shearmur says, "Burr wanted to really lean into the character story and return to the Austen book. He felt that the zombies were just a giant obstacle that made it more difficult for Liz and Darcy to come together." She adds, "It's not meant to be a parody. It's not meant to be a joke. It should feel scary and emotional and real. But at the same time, there is wit. It would be impossible to blend these varied elements, based on these

It's not meant to be a parody. It's not meant to be a joke. It should feel scary and emotional and real. But at the same time, there is wit

source materials, and it not be good-humoured."

When it came to casting, the project's false dawns had left talent representatives a little sceptical that the film was finally going to get made, especially now with no studio backing. Shearmur, who was a producer on Kenneth Branagh's *Cinderella*, had the inside track on Lily James, who was announced in the Disney film's lead role in April 2013 and started filming in September that year. Shearmur pushed Steers to meet James and he agreed that "in terms of her wit, her directness, her intelligence, her physicality", she would be a great Elizabeth Bennett. Shearmur adds, "Her movie hasn't come out yet, we're not entirely sure what her name is going to mean in the marketplace." But Butan, who would be the one having to sell territory rights on the film, backed the choice.

Pride and Prejudice and Zombies began shooting in Buckinghamshire in September 2014 without the benefit of pre-sales, but Sony Screen Gems were already making positive noises, and in fact quickly agreed to acquire US rights. And in one respect the film ended up right back where it started, when Lionsgate stepped in for the UK. "They have always been in our court on this movie," says Shearmur. "Knowing that Zygi Kamasa, who runs Lionsgate UK, always loved it, you felt like you're not completely without financial advocates on this project." 📌

i *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies* is released in UK cinemas on 12 February and will be reviewed in our next issue

THE NUMBERS OSCAR CONTENDERS

By Charles Gant

When the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences expanded the Best Picture category from five nominees for the 2010 Oscars, it did so with the avowed intention of broadening the definition of 'awards picture', which over the decades had increasingly become rather synonymous with 'prestige drama'. That's not how events panned out: voters instead tended to nominate an expanded field of contenders eerily similar to what they'd already been nominating.

In 2016, however, you could say that the Academy got its wish. Obvious awards bait such as *Spotlight* was joined in the Best Picture category by action and sci-fi blockbusters *Mad Max: Fury Road* and *The Martian*, as well as Cold War thriller *Bridge of Spies*. As for *The Revenant*, it's a curious case of a potentially challenging film from an arthouse director that is nevertheless delivering box office every bit as blockbuster-sized as *Mad Max* and *The Martian*.

In terms of UK release dates, the films are more spread out than usual, with four of the eight Best Picture nominees having landed last year – in May (*Mad Max*), October (*The Martian*) and November (*Brooklyn*, *Bridge of Spies*) – leaving just the other four (*The Revenant*, *Room*, *The Big Short*, *Spotlight*) to fight it out with other prestige titles in the traditionally crowded awards corridor of January and February.

Crispin Lilly, CEO of the boutique chain Everyman, is very pleased by how the pieces fell this year. "It's quite refreshing to see such a lovely mix in there. As an exhibitor, does that help me more or less? It probably helps me less. What's the upside for me in these six to eight weeks from an awards perspective? I'm not going to bring *The Martian* back. I'm not going to bring *Mad Max* back. But if you look at awards as what they should be, which is a genuine celebration of achievement, it's better like this. We shouldn't be looking at it as a revenue driver."

Another difference has been notable this year. Typically, it's the contenders with the biggest commercial potential that grab the first or second weekend of January,



Arthouse gold: *The Revenant*

elbowing weaker competitors aside into late January and early February slots and enjoying a longer run at audiences all the way to the Oscar ceremony. Previous examples include *Slumdog Millionaire*, *The King's Speech*, *Les Misérables* and *The Theory of Everything*. This time, *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* was the fly in the ointment, since the early slots in January coincided with the blockbuster's third and fourth weekends of release, when its market dominance remained in full effect.

In 2016, no film that ended up earning a Best Picture Oscar nomination was released in early January. Instead, *The Danish Girl*, *Joy* and *The Hateful Eight* went out in this period, all achieving middling success. For Fox's *The Revenant*, mid-January worked well – it arrived just as *The Force Awakens* was seriously fading, achieving a stunning opening, upward of £5 million.

Lilly agrees that, this year, 15 January was probably the plum date for a film seeking to avoid being clobbered by *The Force Awakens* while still exploiting awards attention to the full. But it wasn't always obvious that *The Revenant*'s occupancy of the date necessarily heralded a big commercial win. "I don't think it was that clear-cut until early December, when the exhibition industry saw it," he says. "That's when everyone got very, very excited." 📌

2016 BEST PICTURE OSCAR NOMINEES AT THE US AND UK BOX OFFICE

Film	US gross	UK gross
The Martian	\$228m	£23.5m
Mad Max: Fury Road	\$154m	£17.4m
The Revenant	\$119m	£12.0m
Bridge of Spies	\$71.5m	£7.62m
The Big Short	\$56.7m	£1.28m
Spotlight	\$33.0m	released Jan 29
Brooklyn	\$27.5m	£5.41m
Room	\$7.95m	£1.77m

All grosses at January 25

HARA SETSUKO



Moving pictures: Hara Setsuko, seen here in Ozu Yasujiro's *Late Spring*, remains indelibly associated with that director, with whom she made six films

17/6/1920 – 15/9/2015

Shortly after the death in 1963 of her frequent collaborator, director Ozu Yasujiro, Hara Setsuko announced her retirement from cinema. She was only in her early 40s, and for half a century was to live as a recluse in Kamakura. That ancient capital and commuter town south of Tokyo had been the setting for some of her finest films, but in retirement she earned comparisons with Greta Garbo, declining interviews and refusing to discuss her work in the film industry.

By the time of her death last September, Hara seemed a figure from a remote past, the last surviving great star from the golden age of Japanese film. For many Western viewers, she was the personification of the particular mood of classical Japanese cinema – quiet, serene, accepting, yet intense and moving – represented by Ozu and his *Tokyo Story* (1953). In that film, Hara played a war widow, Noriko, who bonds with her parents-in-law, neglected by their biological children. For many viewers, the scene following the mother's death, in which Noriko responds to her younger sister-in-law's question, "Isn't life disappointing?", with wry agreement, is the iconic Hara moment.

Hara remains indelibly associated with Ozu, for whom she appeared in six starring roles. In *Late Spring* (1949) and *Early Summer* (1951) she had already played a character called Noriko. The subject of both films was the heroine's reluctance to marry, with the Noriko of *Late Spring* preferring to continue living with her widowed father. In both films, reluctance is gradually overcome by

familial pressure. Hara's association with such roles earned her the somewhat inappropriate nickname of 'eternal virgin' from Japanese viewers. Rather, critic Robin Wood has argued, her performances crucially challenged assumptions surrounding Japanese female conduct: a key feature of Hara's star persona was "resistance to male definition". Hara herself never married, an unusual choice in mid-20-century Japan.

Born Aida Masae in Yokohama, Hara entered the film industry at the age of 15 through the good offices of her brother-in-law, director Kumagai Hisatora. One of her first major roles, for director Itami Mansaku, was in *New Earth* (1937), a co-production designed to cement links with Japan's fascist ally, Germany, and realised in collaboration with German director Arnold Fanck. Hara herself visited the country in 1937 and had the dubious honour of meeting Goebbels. Back in Japan, she acted again for Itami in his last film as director, *The Giant* (1938), an adaptation of *Les Misérables*.

During the war, as Japanese cinema was subjected to ever more stringent controls from the state, Hara starred in several propaganda films for the war effort. But in the late 1940s, she played key roles in a number of films advancing the liberal democratic agenda of the occupying Americans.

Her performances challenged assumptions about Japanese female conduct and her star persona resisted male definition

For Kurosawa Akira, she starred in *No Regrets for Our Youth* (1946) as the daughter of a liberal professor imprisoned for free speech during the militarist era. Her determined persona in that film contrasts startlingly with her later work for Ozu. In Yoshimura Kozaburo's *The Ball at the Anjo House* (1947), about an aristocratic family facing ruin due to post-war legal and social changes, Hara was the flexible, sensitive daughter who embraces the new and saves the family from destruction.

Hara was to work again for Kurosawa in his Dostoyevsky adaptation *The Idiot* (1951), atypically playing Natassya Filippovna as a femme fatale. In the same year, she starred in Naruse Mikio's *Repast* (1951), a sensitive study of a couple experiencing marital problems. She gave one of her finest performances in Naruse's later *Sound of the Mountain* (1954), an adaptation of a Kawabata novel. Again, the focus of the film was marital discord, with Hara's character, Kikuko, responding to her husband's infidelity with an act of shocking defiance. But the film found a positive emotional focus in the friendship and mutual respect between Kikuko and her sympathetic father-in-law. Among Hara's later films were three more for Ozu, including *Late Autumn* (1960), a reworking of *Late Spring*; Hara now played the parent trying to manoeuvre her daughter into marriage.

Her early retirement puzzled her fans, and beyond a statement that she had never enjoyed acting, she chose never to explain it. Perhaps Hara herself, like the characters she played, was resistant to definition. **Alexander Jacoby**

January to December 2015

Compiled by Bob Mastrangelo



Denotes an extended obituary
at bfi.org.uk/sightandsound

LATE 2014

Robert Kinoshita, 100: designer who played a critical role in creating Robby the Robot for *Forbidden Planet*.

Gerald Sim, 89: actor who was a favourite of his brother-in-law Richard Attenborough and Bryan Forbes, and co-starred in Hammer's *Dr. Jekyll & Sister Hyde*.

ACTORS

Ando Noboru, 89: Japanese gangster-turned-actor who starred in yakuza films, sometimes inspired by his own colourful life (*The History of a Man's Face*; *Graveyard of Honour*).

Laura Antonelli, 73: Italian actress whose roles often capitalised on her strong sensuality (*Malizia*; Visconti's *L'innocente*).

Richard 'Dick' Bakalyan, 84: specialised in playing hoods and henchmen (*The Bonnie Parker Story*), but was also the detective who shot Faye Dunaway in *Chinatown*.

James Best, 88: often played slightly unhinged characters (*Ride Lonesome*; *Shock Corridor*) and was the redneck sheriff on TV's *The Dukes of Hazzard*.

Theodore Bikel, 91: bulky, versatile actor and singer who was cast as a variety of nationalities (*The Defiant Ones*; *The Russians Are Coming, the Russians Are Coming*).

Wally Cassell, 103: a familiar face from World War II films (*The Story of G.I. Joe*) and *noirs*, including being part of Cagney's gang in *White Heat*.

Movita Castaneda, 98: Mexican-American actress whose performance as Franchot Tone's wife in Lloyd's *Mutiny on the Bounty* led to a string of Pacific Islander roles.

George Coe, 86: veteran character actor (*Kramer vs. Kramer*) who also co-directed the cult Bergman parody *De Diiva: The Dove*.



George Cole, 90: played the young Ebenezer in the 1951 *Scrooge*, Flash Harry in the *St. Trinian's* films and Arthur Daley on TV's *Minder*.

Kevin Corcoran, 66: child actor for Disney (*Old Yeller*; *The Shaggy Dog*) who later worked in TV production.

Jean Darling, 93: child actress who starred in more than 30 *Our Gang* comedies during the silent and early talkie eras and played the young Jane Eyre in the 1934 version.

Danièle Delorme, 89: French actress who starred in Audry's three Colette adaptations and played a young woman plotting murder in Duvivier's *Deadlier Than the Male*.

Betsy Drake, 92: leading lady of the 1950s, including opposite her then-husband Cary Grant (*Room for One More*; *Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?*).

Richard Dysart, 86: actor typically seen as authority figures, either benevolent, malicious or somewhere in between (*Being There*; *The Thing*; *Pale Rider*).

Anita Ekberg, 83: Swedish sex symbol who co-starred in Vidor's *War and Peace*, twice



Anita Ekberg in *La Dolce Vita*

supported Martin and Lewis, and waded into the Trevi Fountain in *La Dolce Vita*.

Nour El-Sherif, 69: Egyptian actor who starred in films for Youssef Chahine (*An Egyptian Story*; *Destiny*).

Gabriele Ferzetti, 90: Italian actor who made his mark as Sandro in *L'avventura* and Morton the railroad baron in *Once upon a Time in the West*.

Sally Forrest, 86: actress-dancer who played dramatic roles for Ida Lupino (*Not Wanted*) and Fritz Lang (*While the City Sleeps*).

Ivo Garrani, 91: Italian character actor (Bava's *Black Sunday*; *The Leopard*).

Coleen Gray, 92: played John Wayne's ill-fated love in *Red River*, but was more closely identified with *noir* roles (*Kiss of Death*; *The Killing*).

Faten Hamama, 83: actress who was a major force in Egyptian cinema, often teamed with her one-time husband Omar Sharif (*The River of Love*; *I Want a Solution*).

Roger Hanin, 89: French actor who co-wrote and played the title role in Chabrol's two *Tiger* films and co-starred in *Rocco and His Brothers*.

Gunnar Hansen, 68: actor who created one of horror's most distinctive villains with his portrayal of Leatherface in Hooper's *The Texas Chain Saw Massacre*.

Hara Setsuko, See box, opposite.

Barbro Hiort af Ornäs, 94: Swedish actress who shared the best actress prize at Cannes for *Brink of Life* and had small roles in other Bergman films (*All These Women*).

Alan Howard, 77: noted Shakespearean actor whose biggest impact on film was as the lover in *The Cook, the Thief, His Wife & Her Lover*.

Franco Interlenghi, 83: starred in some key Italian films of the post-war period (*Shoeshine*; *Sunday in August*; *I vitelloni*).



Saeed Jaffrey, 86: distinguished supporting actor of Indian and British cinema (*The Man Who Would Be King*; *The Chess Players*; *My Beautiful Laundrette*).

Richard Johnson, 87: played a paranormal scientist in Wise's *The Haunting*, twice starred as Bulldog Drummond and was Charlton Heston's deputy in *Khartoum*.

Dean Jones, 84: clean-cut leading man, notably of Disney comedies (*That Darn Cat*; *The Love Bug*).

Louis Jourdan, 93: debonair actor who was Hollywood's ideal Frenchman (*Letter from an Unknown Woman*; *Gigi*) and later was a memorable Bond villain (*Octopussy*).

Anna Kashfi, 80: actress known as much for her brief marriage to Marlon Brando as for her Hollywood career (*Battle Hymn*; *Cowboy*).



Christopher Lee, 93: aristocratic horror and fantasy icon whose roles included Count Dracula, Lord Summerisle, Frankenstein's monster, Scaramanga, the Comte de Rochefort and Saruman.

Joan Leslie, 90: actress whose most famous roles came while she was still in her teens (*High Sierra*; *Sergeant York*; *Yankee Doodle Dandy*).

Geoffrey Lewis, 79: actor most familiar for his roles opposite Clint Eastwood (*Thunderbolt and Lightfoot*; *Every Which Way but Loose*).

Robert Loggia, 85: was typically cast as tough guys (De Palma's *Scarface*; *Jagged Edge*), but also played the toy tycoon who dances on a giant piano with Tom Hanks in *Big*.

Patrick Macnee, 93: the dapper John Steed of TV's *The Avengers*, his film roles included *The Howling* and *A View to a Kill*.



Christopher Lee played Saruman in Peter Jackson's *Lord of the Rings* trilogy

Colette Marchand, 90: French ballerina who was Oscar-nominated for one of her rare film appearances, as the streetwalker Marie Charlet in Huston's *Moulin Rouge*.

Geraldine McEwan, 82: co-starred in Branagh's *Henry V* and *The Magdalene Sisters* and later played Miss Marple on TV.

Keith Michell, 88: distinguished stage actor whose film roles were typically in costume dramas (*The Hellfire Club*; *Henry VIII and His Six Wives*).

Martin Milner, 83: perennially youthful-looking actor (*Sweet Smell of Success*; *Compulsion*) who found greater recognition on TV.

Warren Mitchell, 89: busy character actor (*The Assassination Bureau*; *Jabberwocky*) who became a household name with his role as Alf Garnett on TV.

Ron Moody, 91: was a memorable Fagin in *Oliver!* and also co-starred in *The Mouse on the Moon* and Mel Brooks's *The Twelve Chairs*.

Dickie Moore, 89: child actor who starred in *Our Gang* shorts, was Marlene Dietrich's son in *Blonde Venus* and gave Shirley Temple her first screen kiss in *Miss Annie Rooney*.

Aubrey Morris, 89: colourful character actor who was P.R. Deltoid in *A Clockwork Orange* and the gravedigger in Hardy's *The Wicker Man*.

Leonard Nimoy, 83: actor whose defining role was as Spock in the *Star Trek* TV and film series and who also had success as a director (*3 Men and a Baby*).

Magali Noël, 83: French actress-singer (*Elena and Her Men*) immortalised by Fellini as Gradisca in *Amarcord*.

Maureen O'Hara, 95: spirited Irish actress who was John Wayne's ideal screen match (Dieterle's *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*; *How Green Was My Valley*; *The Quiet Man*).

Gerald S. O'Loughlin, 93: played blue-collar types, especially cops (*In Cold Blood*; *Desperate Characters*).

Betsy Palmer, 88: leading lady of the 1950s (*The Tin Star*) who gained greater notoriety as the psychotic Mrs Voorhees in the original *Friday the 13th*.

Natasha Parry, 84: actress prominent in films in the 1950s, then only sporadically seen on screen (*Dance Hall*; *Knave of Hearts*).

Lance Percival, 81: performer from TV's *That Was the Week That Was*, seen in comic appearances in films (*Darling Lili*; *Up Pompeii*).

Nova Pilbeam, 95: actress remembered for her roles in two Hitchcock films of the 1930s (*The Man Who Knew Too Much*; *Young and Innocent*).

Rex Reason, 86: rugged leading man of the 1950s, known for the sci-fi films *This Island Earth* and *The Creature Walks Among Us*.

Robert Rietti, 92: supporting player who made his biggest mark as a versatile voice actor, dubbing countless roles over the decades, often without screen credit.

Germán Robles, 86: a leading actor of Mexican horror (*The Vampire*; *The Vampire's Coffin*).

Alex Rocco, 79: played a gallery of fast-talking detectives, talent agents and especially mobsters (*The Godfather*; *That Thing You Do!*).

Sadhana, 74: Bollywood star and fashion trendsetter whose distinctive hairstyle was popularly dubbed the 'Sadhana

DIRECTOR

WES CRAVEN



8/2/1939 – 30/8/2015

Wes Craven was the senior member of that extraordinary generation of North American directors who reinvented the horror genre in the 1970s. Remarkably, he would go on to reinvent it again in the 1980s, and yet again in the 1990s, though in interviews he would sometimes express a yearning to move into the mainstream.

After a strict Baptist upbringing in Ohio, he majored in English and Psychology, obtained a master's degree in philosophy and writing, and worked as a college professor of English and humanities before quitting to work in pornography. His official directing debut was *The Last House on the Left* (1972), a grim rape-revenge drama loosely inspired by Ingmar Bergman's *The Virgin Spring* (1960) and promoted with the memorable tagline - "To avoid fainting, keep repeating: 'It's only a movie, only a movie, only a movie...'" The vengeance, wreaked by parents on depraved hippies who murdered their daughter, offers no catharsis but introduces what would be one of Craven's recurring themes - the propensity for violence within outwardly respectable families. In his second film, *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977), a suburban family resorts to savagery to defeat a tribe of mutant cannibals in the Nevada desert; it's a key entry in the psycho-hillbilly subgenre.

In 1984, Craven revitalised the slasher genre with *A Nightmare on Elm Street*, in which Freddy

Krueger, the ghost of a child murderer burned to death by vigilante parents, stalks their children through their nightmares, leading to a creepy, surreal, disorientating scenario in which dreams and reality are constantly overlapping. Apart from a screenplay credit on *A Nightmare on Elm 3: Dream Warriors* (1987), Craven had nothing to do with the increasingly jokey Krueger franchise until *Wes Craven's New Nightmare* (1994) a meta-horror in which creator and stars of the first *Nightmare* movie play themselves. In this and in the hugely successful *Scream* (1996) and its sequels - a postmodern franchise scripted by Kevin Williamson, in which characters discuss the "rules" of slasher movies even as they're being stalked by the 'Ghostface' killer - Craven never allows the self-referential cleverness to swamp his expertly choreographed tension and shocks. It's also worth noting that he provided slasher movies with some of their most resourceful and interesting heroines.

His other horror films include *Deadly Blessing* (1981), *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1987) and *The People Under the Stairs* (1991). He finally broke free of the genre with *Music of the Heart* (1999), in which Meryl Streep teaches violin to disadvantaged schoolchildren, the gloriously absurd thriller *Red Eye* (2005) and a romantic segment of the portmanteau film *Paris, je t'aime* (2006). But his last completed film was a return to horror - *Scream 4* (2011). **● Anne Billson**

cut' (*Love in Simla*; *Woh Kaun Thi?*).

Lizabeth Scott, 92: blonde femme fatale of film noir (*Pitfall*; *Too Late for Tears*).

Jacques Sernas, 89: Lithuanian actor in international films (*Helen of Troy*; *La Dolce Vita*).

Ninón Sevilla, 93: Cuban actress-dancer who was one of the queens of Mexico's

popular *rumberas* films during the genre's golden age (*Aventurera*; *Sensualidad*).

Omar Sharif, 83: charismatic Egyptian actor who became an international star with his roles in *Lawrence of Arabia* and *Doctor Zhivago*.

Rod Taylor, 84: explored the future in Pal's *The Time Machine*, battled an avian

scourge in *The Birds* and was a struggling playwright in *Young Cassidy*.

Nigel Terry, 69: played Prince John in *The Lion in Winter*, King Arthur in *Excalibur* and the title role in *Caravaggio*.

Fred Dalton Thompson, 73: US senator and Watergate investigator with a side career as an actor, often as officials (*The Hunt for Red October*; *In the Line of Fire*).

Uggie the dog, 13: Jack Russell Terrier who effortlessly stole scenes from his human co-stars in *The Artist*.

María Elena Velasco, 74: popular Mexican comic actress – known for her long-running character La India Maria – who also became a director, writer and producer.

Alberta Watson, 60: Canadian actress acclaimed for her roles in *Spanking the Monkey* and *The Sweet Hereafter*.

Elizabeth Wilson, 94: supporting actress who was Benjamin's mother in *The Graduate* and a meddlesome office eavesdropper in *Nine to Five*.

George 'Foghorn' Winslow, 69: child actor of the 1950s with a distinctive deep voice (*My Pal Gus*; *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*).

Holly Woodlawn, 69: transgender actress who starred in films for Warhol and Paul Morrissey (*Trash*; *Women in Revolt*) and inspired Lou Reed's song 'Walk on the Wild Side'.

ANIMATORS

David Anderson, 63: Bafta-winning animation director with a surrealist bent (*Dreamland Express*; *Deadsy*; *Door*).

Yoram Gross, 88: Polish-born filmmaker who pioneered animation in Australia (*Dot and the Kangaroo*; *Blinky Bill*).

René Jodoin, 94: Canadian animation director (*Notes on a Triangle*) and producer (Peter Foldes's *Hunger*) who founded the National Film Board's French animation programme.

Walt Peregoy, 89: influential Disney background artist and colour stylist (*One Hundred and One Dalmatians*; *The Sword in the Stone*).

CINEMATOGRAPHERS

Jean Badal, 88: Hungarian-born cinematographer who worked in France and co-shot two films for Tati (*Playtime*; *Parade*).

Rune Ericson, 90: Swedish cinematographer (Zetterling's *Night Games*; *Till Sex Do Us Part*) and the inventor of Super 16mm.

Andrew Lesnie, 59: Australian cinematographer who had his breakthrough with *Babe* and went on to shoot Jackson's *The Lord of the Rings* and *The Hobbit* trilogies.

Miroslav Ondříček, 80: celebrated Czech cinematographer who also worked in the UK and US (*Loves of a Blonde*; *If...; Amadeus*).

Charles Rosher Jr, 80: cinematographer on two films for Altman (*3 Women*; *A Wedding*).

John M. Stephens, 82: cinematographer and camera operator whose inventions led to advancements in filming action sequences (*Grand Prix*; Friedkin's *Sorcerer*).

Haskell Wexler, 93: See box, page 22.

COMPOSERS & MUSICIANS

Edgar Froese, 70: founder and leader of the German electronic band Tangerine



Lizabeth Scott in *The Strange Love of Martha Ivers*

Dream who also composed film scores (Friedkin's *Sorcerer*; Mann's *Thief*).



James Horner, 61: one of Hollywood's premier composers, known for his elaborate orchestrations (*Braveheart*; *Titanic*).

Ravindra Jain, 71: celebrated Bollywood composer and singer (*Chor Machaye Shor*; *Ram Teri Ganga Maili*).

DIRECTORS



Chantal Akerman, See box, page 23.

Moustapha Alassane, 73: pioneering director of Nigerian cinema who made documentaries, live-action fiction films and animated works (*Aouré*; *Bon Voyage*; *Sim*).

Paul Almond, 83: Canadian director (*Isabel*) whose documentary *Seven Up!* inspired Michael Apted's long-running series.

Sólveig Anspach, 54: Icelandic-French director (*Haut les coeurs!*; *Stormy Weather*).

Vicente Aranda, 88: Spanish director with the Barcelona School (*Fata Morgana*) who later had an international hit with *Amantes*.

Gian Vittorio Baldi, 84: Italian director (*Fuoco!*) who also produced works by Pasolini, Straub-Huillet and Bresson.

Richard L. Bare, 101: director of B pictures (*Shoot-Out at Medicine Bend*), Warner Bros's Joe McDoakes comedy shorts and TV episodes.

Prashant Bhargava, 42: emerging director of *Sangam* and *Patang*.

Jaime Camino, 79: Spanish filmmaker who often explored the legacy of the Civil War (*The Long Holidays of 1936*; *The Long Winter*).

Michael Campus, 80: director of the blaxploitation classic *The Mack* and *The Education of Sonny Carson*.

Albert Maysles



Gil Cardinal, 65: Canadian Métis filmmaker known for his documentaries on indigenous issues (*Foster Child*; *Totem: The Return of the G'psgolox Pole*).

Christopher Chapman, 88: Canadian documentary filmmaker (*A Place to Stand*) whose split-screen innovations were used in such films as Jewison's *The Thomas Crown Affair*.

Rezo Chkheidze, 88: leading Soviet-era Georgian director (*Magdana's Donkey*; *Father of a Soldier*).

Nina Companeez, 77: French screenwriter (*The Horseman on the Roof*) and director (*Faustine et le Bel Été*).

Wes Craven, 76: See box, opposite.

Alberto De Martino, 85: Italian director of low-budget knock-offs of blockbusters (*O.K. Connery*; *Holocaust* 2000).

Helmut Dietl, 70: German director of popular satires (*Schtonk!*; *Rossini*).

Assia Djebar, 78: innovative Algerian writer who also ventured into filmmaking (*La Noubia des femmes du Mont Cénoua*; *La Zerda et les Chants de l'oubli*).

Sarah Erulkar, 92: award-winning documentary filmmaker (*Lord Siva Danced*; *Picture to Post*).

Richard Glatzer, 63: independent writer-director who made films in partnership with his husband Wash Westmoreland (*Quinceañera*; *Still Alice*).

Jack Gold, 85: director of distinguished TV productions (*The Naked Civil Servant*) and the occasional film (*The Bofors Gun*).

John Guillermin, 89: journeyman director most comfortable with action stories (*I Was Monty's Double*; *The Towering Inferno*).

Lotte Hass, 86: Austrian diver who collaborated with her husband Hans on undersea documentaries (*Under the Red Sea*).

Peter Kern, 66: maverick Austrian-born German director (*Domenica*) and actor (*Hitler: A Film from Germany*).

Bakhtyar Khudojnazarov, 49: Tajik director who gained international attention in the 1990s (*Kosh Ba Kosh*; *Luna Papa*).

Tadeusz Konwicki, 88: prominent Polish novelist who also left his mark as a director (*The Last Day of Summer*; *Salto*) and screenwriter (*Mother Joan of the Angels*).

Albert Maysles, 88: maker of trailblazing documentaries, originally in partnership with his brother David (*Salesman*; *Gimme Shelter*; *Grey Gardens*).

Andrew Noren, 71: avant-garde filmmaker, many of whose works were part of a decades-long, multi-film diary project called *The Adventures of the Exquisite Corpse*.

Manoel de Oliveira, 106: Portuguese director renowned for his astonishingly long career (*Aniki-Bôbô*; *Doomed Love*; *I'm Going Home*).

Vasili Pichul, 54: director whose film *Little Vera* was a defining work of Gorbachev-era Soviet cinema.

Francesco Rosi, 92: director who explored Italian politics, corruption and history (*Salvatore Giuliano*; *The Mattei Affair*; *The Truce*).

Candida Royalle, 64: porn star turned director, producer and writer who created adult films for women from a feminist perspective.



CINEMATOGRAPHER

HASKELL WEXLER

6/2/1922 – 27/12/2015

One of the most important cinematographers working during the Hollywood renaissance of the late 60s and 70s, Haskell Wexler brought an urgent, ardent, independent sensibility to American film, influenced by neorealism, the *nouvelle vague*, *cinéma-vérité*, and by the tumult of the times. Wexler cut his teeth on industrial films and short documentaries, usually with an activist bent, working for himself in a business he established with a family trust fund (his father was a successful Chicago businessman).

His break came when Elia Kazan hired him to shoot *America America* (1963), a production designed to escape the Hollywood industrial model. The system embraced Wexler all the same. He won the first of two Academy Awards for *Who's Afraid of Virginia Woolf?* (1966), this time working with debut filmmaker Mike Nichols, who encouraged him to get underneath Elizabeth Taylor's make-up, and didn't mind if a handheld camera was breaking multiple unwritten rules. Still, Wexler could do sexy too, working in colour for the lustrous *In the Heat of the Night* (1967) and the modish *The Thomas Crown Affair* (1968) – both directed by Norman Jewison – before writing and directing his own remarkable first feature, *Medium Cool* (1969). This jagged, pressing portrait of a TV news cameraman (Robert Forster) juggling work, life and politics, stands alongside Arthur Penn's *Mickey One* (1965) and Dennis Hopper's *The Last Movie* (1971) as the most Godardian movie to be released by a major American studio. It's arguably the best of the three; certainly the most attuned to a world beyond cinema. Slapped with an X certificate for a full-frontal nude scene, it wasn't widely distributed, and Wexler would not direct another dramatic feature until the little-regarded Nicaraguan Contra exposé *Latino* in 1985.

Not that he stopped trying. Erstwhile ally Francis Coppola fired him from *The Conversation* (1974) when the DP proved too opinionated (the virtuosic opening



Union Square sequence is all that remains of his work), and producer Michael Douglas followed suit in 1975 when Milos Forman felt undermined on the set of *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* (though 90 per cent of the movie was Wexler's work). More happily, he was visual consultant on *American Graffiti* (1973) and took over from Nestor Almendros, albeit uncredited, to complete Malick's sublime *Days of Heaven* (1978).

If Wexler was too outspoken for some – and the FBI kept tabs on him! – he was a key collaborator for Hal Ashby (*Bound for Glory*, 1976; *Coming Home*, 1978) and later John Sayles, a kindred spirit on four independent features, starting with the powerful union drama *Matewan* (1987). Wexler's radical politics also inspired his own fairly prolific documentary filmmaking, which included *Introduction to the Enemy* (1974), following Jane Fonda through Vietnam towards the end of the war, and *Underground* (1976), a portrait of American revolutionaries the Weathermen, co-directed with Emile de Antonio and Mary Lampson. Even in his 80s Wexler spearheaded the 12 On/12 Off campaign to improve film industry working hours, along with his friend, peer and one-time business partner Conrad Hall. **Tom Charity**

PRODUCERS & STUDIO EXECUTIVES

William Becker, 88: helped transform Janus Films into a major distributor of international and classic Hollywood cinema, including co-founding the Criterion Collection.

Michael Birkett, 85: producer and arts administrator (*The Caretaker*, *Marat/Sade*).

Steve Blauner, 81: one-third of the influential BBS Productions, which produced *Five Easy Pieces* and *The Last Picture Show*.

Robert Chartoff, 81: producer, long in partnership with Irwin Winkler (*Rocky*; *Raging Bull*; *The Right Stuff*).

Samuel Goldwyn Jr, 88: mogul's son who made his name as an independent producer and distributor (*Longtime Companion*; *Master and Commander: The Far Side of the World*).

Denis Héroux, 75: Canadian producer (*Atlantic City*; *Quest for Fire*) who was also a director earlier in his career.

Alan Hirschfield, 79: executive who ran Columbia in the 1970s and 20th Century-Fox in the 1980s.

Kirk Kerkorian, 98: business tycoon who bought and sold MGM three times, reigning over a notoriously tumultuous period in that studio's history.

Roger L. Mayer, 88: executive with MGM and Turner whose greatest impact was as a passionate advocate for film preservation.

Jack Rollins, 100: talent manager of comics who helped discover Woody Allen and Robin Williams and was long credited as a producer on Allen's films.

Jerry Weintraub, 77: larger-than-life concert promoter and Hollywood producer (*Nashville*; Soderbergh's *Ocean's Eleven*).

Bernard Williams, 72: producer who worked on *A Clockwork Orange*, *Ragtime* and *Manhunter*.

SCREENWRITERS

Nicola Badalucco, 86: Italian journalist and author whose screenplays include two with Visconti (*The Damned*; *Death in Venice*).

Michael Blake, 69: novelist and screenwriter of *Dances with Wolves*.

Robert Blees, 96: screenwriter, busiest in the 1950s (Sirk's *Magnificent Obsession*; *From the Earth to the Moon*).

Brian Clemens, 83: writer-producer for TV (*The Avengers*) and film (*Dr. Jekyll & Sister Hyde*) who also directed *Captain Kronos Vampire Hunter*.

Frank D. Gilroy, 89: screenwriter who often adapted his own plays (*The Subject Was Roses*) and occasionally directed (*Desperate Characters*).

Jean Gruault, 90: French screenwriter who collaborated with Truffaut, Resnais, Rivette, Rossellini, Godard and Akerman.

Don Mankiewicz, 93: son of Herman Mankiewicz and a scriptwriter in his own right (*I Want to Live!*; *The Chapman Report*).

D.M. Marshman Jr, 92: co-wrote *Sunset Blvd.*, but left the film business after only two further credits (*Second Chance*; *Taxi*).

Melissa Mathison, 65: screenwriter of *The Black Stallion*, *Kundun* and, most famously, *E.T. the Extra-Terrestrial*.

Ib Melchior, 97: screenwriter (*Robinson Crusoe on Mars*) and occasional director (*The Time Travelers*) of sci-fi tales.

Eldar Ryazanov, 88: Russian director whose popular comedies satirised Soviet life (*Carnival Night*; *The Irony of Fate*).

Gene Saks, 93: director who frequently adapted Neil Simon (*The Odd Couple*) and also acted (*The Prisoner of Second Avenue*).

Barbara Sass, 78: Polish writer-director noted for her strong female protagonists (*Without Love*; *Temptation*).

Bruce Sinofsky, 58: documentarian whose collaboration with Joe Berlinger included the *Paradise Lost* trilogy and *Metallica: Some Kind of Monster*.

Sergio Sollima, 94: Italian director celebrated for his spaghetti westerns (*The Big Gundown*), crime dramas (*Violent City*) and the miniseries *Sandokan*.

René Vautier, 86: French director,

controversial for his anti-colonialist films (*Afrique 50*; *Avoir 20 ans dans les Aurès*).

Xie Tieli, 90: leading director of China's Third Generation (*Early Spring in February*; *Taking Tiger Mountain by Strategy*).

Bud Yorkin, 89: director-producer for films (*Divorce American Style*) and television (*All in the Family*), often in partnership with Norman Lear.

EDITORS

Danford B. Greene, 87: editor who was Oscar-nominated for his work on *Blazing Saddles* and Altman's *MASH*.

Elmo Williams, 102: editor who tackled *High Noon* and *20,000 Leagues Under the Sea*, then co-produced and coordinated the battle scenes for *The Longest Day*.

DIRECTOR

CHANTAL AKERMAN

6/6/1950 – 5/10/2015

I first heard the name 'Chantal Akerman' in 1972 when, with Claire Johnston and Lynda Myles, I was searching for films by women for the Edinburgh Film Festival's 'Women and Film' event. I came across a reference to a short film, *Saute ma ville*, made in Belgium in 1968. Shot, apparently, mostly in the kitchen of a high-rise block, a young woman engages in various activities (ordinary, mysterious, comic, uncanny) until she uses the gas stove to blow herself up, along with the high rise and implicitly, her whole town. We didn't manage to obtain the film, but Akerman, its director, stayed in my mind as a probable exponent of the anarchic, subversive and experimental films that we looked for in women's cinema of the past and that would characterise, we expected, women's cinema of the future.

The following year, when her *Hotel Monterey* was shown at the National Film Theatre's season of contemporary avant-garde film, I met Chantal, who immediately came to stay with Peter Wollen and me in Ladbroke Gardens. Her charm was instant and irresistible: her laughing green eyes, a smile that moved easily between the sweet and the sardonic, and irrepressible energy that could erupt into affection at one moment and impatience at another. (Chantal was not a taker of prisoners).

The end of *Saute ma ville* prefigures the recurring significance of eruption, of explosive force, in Akerman's films. But *Hotel Monterey* also prefigures something else: out of a tight control of time, light and cinematic space, ways in which buildings house human movement and gesture emerge on the screen. Both these traits are developed in *Jeanne Dielman*, 23, *Commerce Quay*, 1080 Brussels (1975). On the one hand, a completely novel depiction of domestic space and domestic gesture emerges out of its controlled minimalism; on the other,

the eruption of violence at the end is as essential to its aesthetic as the explosion is to *Saute ma Ville*. Both endings are apocalyptic and dark, an explosion of the female unconscious into the well-ordered world of bourgeois Brussels. But the wit is more pronounced in *Jeanne Dielman*: the melodramatic murder disorders the film's perfect cinematic formalism, also overtly citing the 'death ending' as a formal narrative device. Explosions of energy, although very differently and less anarchically harnessed, sometimes erupt in later Akerman films: for instance, the mass of unstable emotion, attraction and erotic contradiction in *Toute une nuit* (1982) and the irrepressible music and song, dance and performance, colour and camera in *Golden Eighties* (1986) that can hardly be restrained within the frame.

Wit was a key interest of Akerman's. She described *A Couch in New York* (1996) as an encounter between Hollywood comedy and Jewish humour (which had already been the subject of an early film). As *Jeanne Dielman* has had such enormous and lasting importance for the history of cinema, it has been easy, over the years, to disregard its wit. It could well be argued that the film's repetitions and extended durations summon up the spirit of the comic gag, at times overtly but constantly there, as an anarchic undertow, waiting to be noticed.

The tragedy of Akerman's premature death is beyond words. There is a terrible sadness in the loss of this extraordinarily perceptive observer of human life, its excesses and absurdities, through her idiosyncratic, often sublime, cinema. But this particular moment in time and in her cinematic trajectory adds further poignancy. Her recent films and installations seemed to be reaching a new aesthetic and intellectual level, a reconfiguration of moving image language and thought, that the present moment of moving image and world history desperately needs.  Laura Mulvey



James Salter, 90: novelist and occasional screenwriter (*Downhill Racer*; *Broken English*).

Steve Shagan, 88: screenwriter of *Save the Tiger* and *Voyage of the Damned*.

Stewart Stern, 92: writer for films (*Rachel, Rachel*) and TV (*Sybil*), best known for his screenplay for *Rebel Without a Cause*.

Colin Welland, 81: actor (*Kes*) who found greater success as a screenwriter (*Yanks*; *Chariots of Fire*).

Christopher Wood (aka Timothy Lea), 79: novelist-screenwriter of *Confessions of a Window Cleaner* and its sequels who also wrote two Bond films.

SET & COSTUME DESIGNERS

Gene Allen, 97: production designer and art director and an important contributor to George Cukor's films (*A Star Is Born*; *My Fair Lady*).

Julie Harris, 94: costume designer who helped define the swinging 60s and recreated the Victorian era (*A Hard Day's Night*; *Darling*; *The Wrong Box*).

Patricia Norris, 83: costume and production designer known for her work on period pieces (*Victor Victoria*; *12 Years a Slave*) and the films of David Lynch (*Blue Velvet*).

SOUND & SPECIAL EFFECTS

Howard A. Anderson Jr, 95: visual effects artist whose company created the effects and titles for films (Pal's *The Time Machine*; *Tobruk*) and TV (*Star Trek*).

Bob Minkler, 78: veteran sound mixer (*Star Wars*; *Tron*; *Bull Durham*).

Tex Rudloff, 89: sound mixer on *Taxi Driver*, *The Outlaw Josey Wales* and *The Warriors*.

Eric Tomlinson, 84: music recording engineer who worked on numerous scores, including the original *Star Wars* trilogy.

MISCELLANEOUS

Ron Benson, 72: founder and director of Eureka Entertainment and much respected figure in the UK video industry.

Richard Corliss, 71: film critic with *Time* for more than 30 years, editor of *Film Comment* in the 1970s and 80s and author of the screenwriting survey 'Talking Pictures'.

 **Philip French**, 82: highly respected critic and author, long with the *Observer*, including 35 years as its chief film critic.

 **Penelope Houston**, 88: influential film critic and author, co-founder of the journal *Sequence* and editor of *Sight & Sound*.

Phyllis R. Klotman, 90: scholar who established an archive dedicated to early African-American cinema and is credited with rescuing that forgotten period of film history.

Gilberto Perez, 71: distinguished film professor, scholar, critic and author of *The Material Ghost: Films and Their Medium*.

June Randall, 87: script supervisor whose many credits include Attenborough's *Gandhi*, three Kubrick films and five Bond pictures.

Marshall Schlom, 86: script supervisor who worked with Hitchcock, Wyler, Bogdanovich, Mike Nichols and Stanley Kramer.

Lia Van Leer, 90: founder of the Jerusalem Cinematheque and the Jerusalem Film Festival and a key figure in Israeli cinema. 



WELCOME TO THE DOLLHOUSE

In the transition to the precise, detailed world of 'Anomalisa', a stop-motion tale of a self-help author's existential crisis, Charlie Kaufman might have reined in some of the gargantuan ambition on display in 2008's 'Synecdoche, New York', but his acuity and inventiveness remain undimmed

By Nick Bradshaw

FACE TO FACE

To animate the characters in *Anomalisa*, Duke Johnson and Charlie Kaufman (on set, above) used high-tech dolls (right) with detailed fabric dermises, 3D-printed features and eerily expressive movements

Hi Nick, this is Susannah from Paramount. I have Charlie Kaufman and Duke Johnson on the line for you now. I'll let you know when your 30 minutes are up.

Thanks Susannah. Hi Charlie! Hi Duke!

Hey.

Hey, this is Duke.

How are you both?

We're fine. We're in Miami.

How's Miami?

It's rainy.

Not for the first time in a Charlie Kaufman movie, *Anomalisa* begins with words – clouds of them. While 2002's self-fictionalising *Adaptation* opened with the surrogate schlub-writer's own fretful interior monologue ("Do I have an original thought in my head? My bald head..."), *Anomalisa*'s oral prologue is more depersonalised, dissociative, free-floating – a rising fugue of monotone prattle that crowds up like one of Steve Reich's tape-loop compositions, or the crescendo of self-chatter that constitutes Don Hertzfeldt's thumbnail cartoon of our evolutionary trajectory *The Meaning of Life* (2005), a rendition of the human navel-gaze eternal set to Tchaikovsky's Piano Concerto No 1.

In *Anomalisa*, we're in the clouds with a middle-aged business traveller, Michael Stone. Touching down in Cincinnati, he plugs into Delibes's *Lakmé* on his iPod, and is still humming the Flower Duet when he picks up a taxi. "That's British Airways," the cabbie says when he hears it, trying to make small talk. Gradually he elicits that his brusque fare is an expat Brit in town for just a day from his home in Los Angeles, which explains Stone's slightly grating transatlantic Mancunian drawl. Still, at least it's distinctive, whereas the cabbie's male Midwestern bright-bland tones seem indistinguishable from those of Stone's plane-seat neighbour, and indeed from 'Joan Sutherland' on his iPod – and from those of the receptionist, and the room-service clerk when he checks into the Hotel Fregoli. And William Powell and Carole Lombard on TV. And his wife, when he calls home. And his son...

If you're wondering where Charlie Kaufman has been since *Synecdoche, New York* (2008), part of the answer is that he's been failing to get funding for a film about social-media rage (working title *Frank or Francis*), which you'd think the world would need – but *Synecdoche* wasn't a hit and the Hollywood studios have pivoted even further towards blockbusters since the global economic crash. At the same time, he took shelter with an independent animation house, Starburns Industries, to adapt, at the usual animation snail's pace, a 'sound play' he wrote in 2005. *Anomalisa* was the second of two such pieces he wrote for composer Carter Burwell's 'Theater of the New Ear' project, in which actors stage-read a radio play accompanied by musicians and a foley artist; the Coen brothers hadn't been able to bring their contribution to Burwell's programme to Los Angeles, so Kaufman followed up his first play, the meta-performative *Hope Leaves the Theater*, with *Anomalisa*, a three-hander written for David Thewlis and Jennifer Jason Leigh in the lead roles and a very busy Tom Noonan – the actor who plays Philip Seymour Hoffman's stage surrogate in *Synecdoche, New York* – voicing everyone else. The play was attributed to one Francis Fregoli, but Kaufman has clawed back the credit for the movie.

As you may have read elsewhere already, or guessed from our headline, or surmised from the accompanying pictures, *Anomalisa* is made with dolls – high-tech dolls, given highly detailed, 3-D-printed features

PHOTOGRAPH BY RICARDO DEARATANHA/LOS ANGELES TIMES/CONTOUR BY GETTY IMAGES



and physiques and eerily expressive armature movements – but dolls all the same, freighted with the usual existential questions of autonomy, agency, corporeality and mind/body dualism. To some extent Kaufman has been here before – writing the character of John Cusack’s marionettist Craig Schwartz in *Being John Malkovich* (1999), not to mention treating the titular actor himself as a metaphysical sock-puppet. Still, the discipline is clearly more the fiefdom of Kaufman’s collaborators. Producer Dino Stamatopoulos befriended Kaufman as a fellow writer on *The Dana Carvey Show* in the mid-90s, saw the 2005 staging of *Anomalisa* and spent several years chivvying its author for a copy of the script. Co-director Duke Johnson is a young puppeteer who cut his teeth on episodes of Stamatopoulos’s Adult Swim channel comedies *Mary Shelley’s Frankenhole* (scabrous historico-literary revisionism enacted by stop-motion paper dolls), *Moral Orel* (deadpan bad education in clay-mation middle America) and a special Christmas episode of Dan Harmon’s cult sitcom *Community* in which the characters become self-aware stop-motion puppets. Harmon and Stamatopoulos formed Starburns Industries in 2010 and began fundraising for *Anomalisa* in 2011.

Have you thought about puppets since putting them in ‘Being John Malkovich’?

Have I thought about them at all, in my life?

...In your work.

No, I haven’t thought about them at all. The only time I think I thought about them was when I saw Martin McDonagh’s play ‘The Pillowman’, where the children were represented by puppets, and I thought that was a really cool idea and a way around having to have children on stage in a Broadway production. But no, when Duke and Dino came to me with this I wasn’t thinking about it at all. I like puppets, but it wasn’t something in my mind.

Why did you write them into ‘Being John Malkovich’?

Well, I thought it was funny to create a world without any explanation that was a little bit different to ours, in which puppetry was taken seriously, and I thought it was funny that Craig took it seriously. But in addition to that I remember seeing this puppeteer named Bruce Schwartz, who builds and performs his own puppets, and the movements and stories that he tells are very, very small: someone writing a letter at a table, that kind of thing. And they’re extraordinary: beautifully built and beautifully subtle, and I remember thinking it was a different thing I hadn’t seen before, and I do think he was in my head somewhere. It’s like, for the same reason I chose Malkovich as the subject of a portal, just because I thought it was funny.

One of the funniest scenes in *Being John Malkovich* – one of the prize scenes in all cinema – is when Malkovich followed the pilgrimaging hordes down the portal to his own mind and found himself caught in a self-referential feedback loop: Malkoviches, Malkoviches everywhere, with nothing but ‘Malkovich’ to say. *Anomalisa* conjures a slow-burn equivalent, though it takes a little while to be sure of the point – perhaps we’re habituated to hearing blandly friendly disembodied voices as we go about the assistive city; perhaps, also, we assume the film’s model department had limited resources, for not only does almost every voice sound the same, so every face Michael meets is interchangeable.

That this might be more subjective experience than scenario from *Invasion of the Body Snatchers* seems to follow from Michael’s impassive reactions to the same-

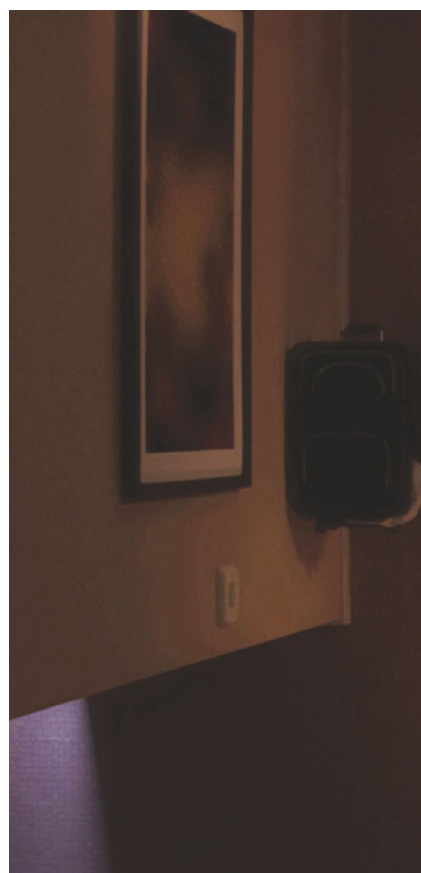
ness around him. He looks up an old girlfriend he walked out on ten years earlier – she too looks and sounds like all the others – and rather than offer her a belated explanation he fumbles a fresh move on her, to her further distress. ‘It’s boring, everything’s boring... I’m a mess, things are not right,’ he stammers. The movie doesn’t spell out what’s wrong with him – unless, that is, you count the in-joke behind the name of its hotel, a reference to the Fregoli delusion, a perceptual disorder named after the late 19th-century quick-change actor Leopoldo Fregoli whereby an individual believes several people are in fact one person in different disguises. But his disengagement clearly packs an irony given what we learn of his fame as a customer-services guru and author of the self-help best-seller *How May I Help You Help Them?* (a title reminiscent of the infinitely reflexive uroboric spirit of Philip K. Dick’s line about selling the same McDonaldburger “back and forth to each other forever” from *A Scanner Darkly*, that masterpiece of psycho-paranoiac alienation, of which Kaufman has written an unfilmed screen adaptation).

Kaufman demonstrated his aversion to formula peddlers in *Adaptation*’s lampoon of screenwriting guru Robert McKee, and *Anomalisa* strongly suggests Michael’s malaise is symptomatic – synecdochical, even – of a wider alienation, with the Hotel Fregoli as metonym for corporately managed uniformity at large, everything a perfect replica or performance, its real workings hidden, the vanishing lines of the hotel’s corridors of rooms a kind of infinite hall of mirrors of the soul. Much has been written about the movie’s flirtation with the ‘uncanny valley’ of uncomfortably lifelike animation, but just as unnerving are its renditions of modern service-economy drills, such as the delicious encounter with a desk clerk able to complete check-in without ever breaking eye contact.

And yet – what to make of Michael himself, certainly not one of the world’s more expressive or generously spirited individuals?

I’m interested in the differences between Michael, a demotivated motivational speaker, and your other protagonists with their more creative outlets: he seems to have less ability to articulate what’s inside his head. How did you approach that classic challenge of presenting an alienated protagonist who could easily become alienating?

The second part of your description of him is of no interest to me, as a writer. I’m not interested in whether he is alienating or not; I’m interested that he is alienated, and I’m always interested in figuring out how to portray people through their subjective experience. So very much like with the character in ‘Synecdoche, New York’, I decided to externalise an interior



STRANGERS IN THE NIGHT

The Hotel Fregoli, in which Michael meets love interest Lisa (above) and her friend Emily (below) in *Anomalisa*, represents the kind of crushing corporate uniformity that is at least partially responsible for his malaise





experience, and in this case I was using the one-voice character of the rest of the world to do that. That's how we see what he sees, in a stylised way. But yeah, he doesn't have any ability or outlet for this, which I think is why he's trapped.

Just as Michael's anomie threatens to benumb the movie, we meet Lisa. Michael is looking for something or someone, careening from hotel door to door, when he bursts in on two devotees of his work, team leaders in the phone room of a Midwestern distributor of packaged bakery items, in town on a treat to hear him speak; he invites them down to the bar to discuss phone system innovations. Emily is flirty and forward but samey. Lisa's her habitual wingman, bashful – and, finally, a different face and voice: a beacon. Michael coaxes her back to his room, where this earnest and chaste woman sings him an a cappella version of 'Girls Just Wanna Have Fun', frail and heartfelt, bringing tears to his eyes. Is Michael making fun of her? Is the movie? No? Yes? Fondly? I don't ask, bearing in mind the point Kaufman has just made, that "I don't draw any conclusions about any character... whether or not [a judgement] is objectively true or not is not an issue because the only thing that's true is the subjective experience." Instead I decided to ask the greatest screenwriter of his generation whether it was hard to write a good woman.

And when we get to Lisa, was it an issue for you, she's the one chink of light, the female character as key to his problems, his salvation. Were you conscious of needing to make sure she wouldn't become too pat?

I don't think so. I wanted Lisa to be conspicuously non-amazing, as a human being: I didn't want him to fall in love with someone who was brilliant or beautiful or in any way exceptional, other than that she's an individual, and all individuals

are exceptional by definition. That was a point, but I like Lisa a lot as a character. There's something very charming about her to me, but I think initially the release that you feel when you hear a different voice is the release that Michael feels, because literally it's a different voice.

She has a vulnerability and yet a confidence in her honesty.

Yeah, I just like her. I think she's funny, and she's sweet and she's vulnerable, mostly, is the thing I like about her.

Michael and Lisa trade notes on their night – she's an anomaly to him; the evening's an anomaly for her – and consummate matters with stirringly non-heroic sex. This being very much a chamber drama, we've already studied Michael in the shower, and seen his kung fu technique for flipping the loo-seat lid, and the sex is animated frankly but non-pruriently – this isn't *Team America: World Police*.

They sleep. Then the movie takes a turn for the surreal.

What determinations did you make about how much realism you wanted? On the one hand you've got possibly Brechtian devices like the visible face-plate lines on the dolls, and on the other hand you've got incredible details like the moisture in their eyes, or the precision of their movements... It seemed like you must have been animating on ones [one movement per frame or 24 different movements per second, the expensive route?]

Yeah, we shot on twos a surprisingly large number of times. This is Duke, by the way.

Still, it's very fluid.

I mean, we were trying for subtlety and nuance, in every aspect, in terms of the facial expressions and also in the body movements, that was our goal. Because it's a very small film, in terms of what the action is, so we wanted it to be an expressive film, and to use the animation to serve that purpose. So it's very different from a lot of animations, especially

As a writer, I'm not interested in whether the lead character is alienating or not; I'm interested that he is alienated



THE PUPPETMASTER

The film's co-director Duke Johnson (below, on set) was brought on board by producer Dino Stamatopoulos, who first saw the stage play of *Anomalisa* in 2005 and spent several years badgering its author for a copy of the script



kids' animations, which are very theatrical and presentational.

As far as the Brechtian thing – I recognise that the scene can be seen as a distancing device, but really our goal was to embrace the form, which is that this is stop-motion, and when those joints are painted out in post-production and the stop-motion is polished as it most often is in feature films, you lose any sense of place or what it is that you're looking at, and it could be computer generated, you don't really know, it just becomes mushy. And we wanted to embrace that it was done by people and handmade, and that those flaws, if you will, are the very things that make it more human an experience, rather than less human.

Back in 2011, when Starburns took to Kickstarter to launch the production, *Anomalisa* broke that platform's crowdfunding record. Not that \$406,237 gets you very far through a 118,089-frame movie... You can still see the fundraising campaign's digital trail, and the long interlude while the team went to ground, before emerging last autumn to win the Grand Jury Prize at the Venice Film Festival (the first animation to win it) and find itself bought up by a studio, Paramount, hungry for awards fare. *Anomalisa* now finds itself mixing with the latest from the past masters at Pixar, Aardman and Studio

Ghibli in the nominations for the Best Animated Feature Oscar – lacing that game with rare rum notes of modernist bewilderment and angst.

In retrospect, how would you describe the difference between working through the studio process and through Kickstarter? I imagine that platform comes with its own strange demands?

Yeah, that's true, you are in a sense beholden to 6,000 random people who've contributed to your Kickstarter. But it's not similar to working within the studio system. I can only speak from my own personal experience – this is Duke. I had worked in television before this, so obviously you're limited by budgets and schedules and network demands – whereas in the case of Kickstarter, the only obligation we had was what we said we'd do, which was make this movie exactly how we wanted to do it. So creatively speaking we didn't have to answer to anybody. But we also didn't have the safety net or the backing of a studio, and we had to keep finding ways to get more money, so it was very challenging from a financial standpoint.

So rich, open-minded producers still top your wish-list?

Definitely. We would love to do another stop-motion movie, Duke and our producer Rosa Tran and I. This is Charlie. But we would like the circumstances to be just a little bit easier.

This is your last question, Nick.

Do you feel any more confident about other projects that might be in the pipeline?

This is Charlie – I'll answer first. I do a little more, but it remains to be seen if the movie does well at the box office. That is the decisive factor, for anything really. I mean, the reviews have been mostly positive, and that's good and helpful, but we also need the other thing, because that's how people decide if they want to invest, is whether they think they're going to get a return. Duke, do you wanna...

So if people wanna see more Charlie Kaufman movies, they have to go to the theatre and not download it or BitTorrent it.

Right, thank you so much for your time, Nick, that's all the time we have.

Okay, thanks. Thank you, Charlie. Thank you, Duke.

Thanks Nick!

Thanks Nick! 📞



Anomalisa is released in UK cinemas on

11 March and will be reviewed in our next issue



PULLING THE STRINGS

Charlie Kaufman's brilliant, funny, self-reflexive philosophical investigations trade on a neurotic vision of the self that is perpetually on the verge of catastrophic collapse

By Jonathan Romney

Since the turn of the millennium, critics have had a very useful second 'K-word' to use as an alternative or a complement to 'Kafkaesque'. Both terms carry some of the same connotations: an overwhelming anxiety about the human condition, elaborated in precise and powerful metaphors; a peculiar, not to say perverse, relationship to the artforms practised by the artists in question; and a commitment to philosophical inquiry through fiction. That latter quality is all the more notable in the case of Charlie Kaufman, since he operates in a field – the fringes of mainstream American cinema – in which overt philosophical content is usually considered surplus to requirements.

That latter quality is something Kaufman

has eagerly drawn our attention to throughout his career. In the film that first earned him notoriety, *Being John Malkovich* (1999), characters keep telling each other excitedly that their discovery – that people can literally get into John Malkovich's head – has massive philosophical repercussions. The films written or directed by Kaufman offer rich food for abstract reflection, and their scripts make sure we know. His way of signalling his themes is self-conscious in both senses: self-reflexive, but also carrying a tinge of embarrassment and anxiety, as if Kaufman can't believe that he's getting away with philosophising in an American comedy and fears he won't be allowed to get away with it for much longer.

Indeed, Kaufman's directing debut *Synecdoche, New York* (2008) could easily have put a stop to his game. It was a recklessly anti-commercial venture and the perception, held by many, that Kaufman was over-reaching – in a film about a man over-reaching – appeared at once to halt his meteoric rise and leave him creatively winded. Now *Anomalisa* shows Kaufman restating his characteristic preoccupations to eloquent and surprisingly moving effect – it's his most human-seeming film since *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (Michel



***Being John Malkovich* (1999)**

Gondry, 2004), which is nicely paradoxical, given that its characters are all puppets.

Kaufman's return to puppetry, so prominent a theme in *Malkovich*, reaffirms an awareness that runs through his fictions: that characters in a film are never autonomous entities, however much we want to believe that they are. Rather, they are empty spaces to be invested with real-seeming life, potential beings temporarily embodied by living actors on screen. But someone else makes those actors move, speak, emote in a certain way – a writer or a director, or both. And beyond that, it's ultimately the viewer



Coming of age: Samantha Morton and Philip Seymour Hoffman in *Synecdoche, New York* (2008)

who makes the actor's contortions mean something. But the power of such hidden manipulators is lampooned mercilessly in *Malkovich*, in which puppeteer hero Craig is a nebbish, hopeless at running his own life, yet prodigiously talented when he gets inside the head of Malkovich and starts to 'direct' him. The film – about the possibility of literally entering a movie star's head – is a trenchant parable of viewer identification, about the projection of our desires into the fantasy bodies of screen actors. But it's also a warning that we should be aware of how our fantasies work, lest we project ourselves into a delirium that demolishes our own sense of self.

In *Adaptation* (Spike Jonze, 2002), Kaufman demystifies the process by which films are made, showing how much sheer delusion and compromise goes into making a fiction, starting from the bottom up, from the fundamental level of story. The screenwriter's apparent self-portrait(s) – as neurotic struggling screenwriter 'Charlie Kaufman', and his brash, commercially astute twin 'Donald' – tells us outright something that, with most films, it's so easy to forget: that behind every movie is a writer or writers, although they rarely get to claim the creative credit they consider their due. Based on the fictional Charlie Kaufman's attempt to adapt a real book by the real Susan Orlean, *Adaptation* is arguably the most self-dissecting American commercial movie ever, the US mainstream's equivalent to, say, Godard's *Passion* (1982). The film agonises over the dominance of the rules of screenwriting espoused by Robert McKee (himself a character in the drama), and destroys those rules by putting them preposterously to work in front of our eyes.

The success and the peculiarity of *Being John Malkovich* established the existence of the phenomenon known as a 'Charlie Kaufman movie', making him that rare phenomenon, a writer whose auteur stamp overshadows that of his directors (we don't necessarily think of *Malkovich* and *Adaptation* as having the 'Spike Jonze' touch, because we still don't really know what that might be, nor do we think of *Eternal Sunshine* as primarily a Gondry film because, mercifully, it's less Gondryesque than some of the director's other work). Even a film that seems less extravagantly idiosyncratic than the others, *Confessions of a Dangerous Mind* (George Clooney, 2002), the digressive anti-biopic of TV gameshow supremo and *soi-disant* spy Chuck Barris, is very much a writer's film, since it is so acutely conscious of the ways that writers (the film is based on Barris's unreliable memoir) create themselves as both voice and persona.

It is tempting to celebrate Kaufman as a creature of infinite novelty and invention, a naturally expansive imagination. Yet his



Forget me not: Jim Carrey and Kate Winslet in *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004)

real insight is into the way that the mind so easily contracts, gets trapped in its own loops. *Eternal Sunshine* is a comedy about forgetting, about the dangerous temptation to erase painful memories: the film dramatises problems of the self, asking what happens when we choose to let our mind, imagination and emotions shut down. Gondry's exuberant visual language eloquently explores the script's classic philosophical question of who and what a person is, beyond the memories, dreams and aspirations they cling on to so precariously. The self in Kaufman's work is always on the verge of caving in on itself: even such a supposedly monumental thing as the ineffable being of a movie star, we learn in *Malkovich*, can be shut down when the visiting voyeurs inside his head appropriate him for their own purposes.

Charlie Kaufman is that rare phenomenon, a writer whose auteur stamp overshadows that of his directors



Nicolas Cage, in duplicate, in *Adaptation* (2002)

Synecdoche, New York explores a different premise, examining the contradictions both of self-expression and realism. It mocks its artist hero's aspiration to *magnum opus* self-portraiture à la Proust or Harold Brodkey (you can't help wondering whether Norwegian author Karl Ove Knausgård has seen this film). But the dominant image is that of the map imagined by Jorge Luis Borges, which, as it approaches a maximum of representative accuracy, becomes exactly the size of the territory it depicts. In *Synecdoche*, theatre director Caden Cotard attempts to stage a version of his own life, but the set expands to gradually engulf the world, leaving Cotard ever less in control – and perhaps less 'himself' than is the manifest non-lookalike actor he hires to play him.

After *Synecdoche*'s maximalism, *Anomalisa*'s recourse to a table-top world of stop-motion puppetry might seem like a retreat – although this Kickstarter-funded project also represents a brilliant escape from a career impasse. The extravagant strangeness of some earlier Kaufman projects seems muted in this simple story of mundane characters' experiences in a mundane hotel, except that the strangeness – dream sequences notwithstanding – has largely been absorbed into the very texture of the film, and into the way we are bound to perceive it, as we constantly measure Duke Johnson's puppets against the imaginary presence of the 'real' people who never show up. Erasing human presence from all but his soundtrack, Kaufman has paradoxically made the film of his that feels closest to an everyday experience that we can all recognise – real life, but shrunk to eerily enclosed snow-globe scale. ☹

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RISE OF THE REBOOTS

From 'Creed' and 'Point Break' to the latest 'Star Wars', Hollywood is awash with recycled properties reinventing well-loved stories and characters for a new generation – but is our current pop cinema really any more generic than ten, 20 or even 50 years ago?

By Nick Pinkerton

Shortly after the spoilerphobia had died down following the release of J.J. Abrams's *Star Wars: Episode VII – The Force Awakens* and the public discussion of the film began in earnest, a number of commentators, this critic included, started in by noting the fact that a lot of what happens in Abrams's film is reminiscent of a certain 1977 blockbuster directed by George Lucas.

As Lucas's fin de millennium prequels had come to be widely regarded as catastrophes, *The Force Awakens* was either greeted as a rebirth or at the very least deemed an efficient work of fan service, introducing a new crop of characters as much in thrall to the mythology of the *Star Wars* universe as the anticipated mass audience. In fact a certain degree of déjà vu is hardwired into the *Star Wars* saga, which under the new management of the Walt Disney Company is set to stretch out infinitely into the horizon with the announcement of 'expanded universe' titles such as *Rogue One* and the public star-search for a young Han Solo. Lucas, before he first began his retirement plan and tentpole to end all tentpoles, famously consulted Joseph Campbell's comparative mythology study *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (1949), taking notes on the cross-cultural monomyth which Campbell had identified, so as better to tap into this primal story.

Following the original *Star Wars* almost beat by beat, *The Force Awakens* is a sequel which feels at times like a remake – and it was hardly the only remake in town. When it opened on Christmas Day in the US, Warner Bros trotted out *Point Break* to stand in front of the juggernaut, though Ericson Core's Chinese-American co-production remake of Kathryn Bigelow's well-loved 1991 film was mostly overlooked in the hullabaloo over the return to the galaxy far, far away. The previous month, STX Entertainment had released *Secret in Their Eyes* – a star-studded remake of the 2009 Argentine crime thriller *El secreto de sus ojos* – which sank without a trace in the US.

The most successful remakes of 2015 were pseudo-remakes – remakes that didn't acknowledge themselves as such. Sitting just below *The Force Awakens* on the list of the year's top-grossers is *Jurassic World*, in which much the same forces of human cupidity at work in Steven Spielberg's *Jurassic Park* (1992) unleash a new, improved, but recognisable saurian chaos amid the idiots who persist in visiting a dinosaur safari park despite catastrophes in the still recent past. (At present, *Jurassic World* hack Colin Trevorrow is slated to handle





GOING ANOTHER ROUND
Michael B. Johnson and Sylvester Stallone in *Creed* (left), Ryan Coogler's well-received reboot of the *Rocky* franchise; and Daisy Ridley and John Boyega in *Star Wars: Episode VII – The Force Awakens* (below)

Episode IX, the capstone of the latest *Star Wars* trilogy.) And while nowhere near a world force on the same level as *Jurassic World* or *Force Awakens*, Ryan Coogler's *Creed* was a *succès d'estime* for the *Fruitvale Station* (2013) director, a sensitive, thoughtful social realist drama in which Sylvester Stallone's Rocky Balboa agrees to mentor and train the son of his old adversary Apollo Creed, killed in the ring in 1985 by a Soviet superman after a James Brown performance. (Perhaps the most touching thing about Stallone's sustained signature role is the way that he's stayed the same course while surrounded on all sides by whatever absurdities define the era of the latest *Rocky*.) The trailer for Roland Emmerich's *Independence Day: Resurgence*, due this summer, appears to repeat the formula, mixing together a few veteran performers (Jeff Goldblum, a Tolstoy-bearded Bill Pullman) with some young blood and teasing at near reprisals of key scenes, like Pullman's knockoff of the St. Crispin's Day speech from Shakespeare's *Henry V*.

The only thing as inevitable as Hollywood's recycling of properties is the steady influx of think-pieces decrying Hollywood recycling as a symptom of industry-wide timidity and a failure of imagination. That these illustrate much the same failure in the journalistic profession is an irony that is little noted, though in 2007, David Bordwell used his blog, *Observations on Film Art*, to host a discussion posted under the title 'Live with it! There'll always be movie sequels. Good thing, too,' which covers most of the commonsense arguments against the fear of sequels, noting precedents in both the classics (*The Odyssey!*) and classic Hollywood. ➡





AS GOOD AS NEW
(Clockwise from top left)
George Miller's *Mad Max: Fury Road*, Colin Trevorrow's *Jurassic World*, Paul Feig's *Ghostbusters* and Ericson Core's *Point Break*

As always, when talking about recent trends in the entertainment industry, we do well to bear in mind the “nothing new under the sun” wisdom of Ecclesiastes 1:9. Sequels in the modern sense – as opposed to series films built around the same core character or characters, like comedies featuring Chaplin’s Tramp, the Dead End Kids or Abbott and Costello – have been a part of the studio game plan since even before the *Star Wars* watershed. This is discounting many stars of the studio era and beyond who played repeated variations on the same role in custom-made films; directors’ ‘auto-remakes’ of their own material, such as Hitchcock’s two versions of *The Man Who Knew Too Much* (1934 and 1955) or Raoul Walsh’s *High Sierra* (1941) and *Colorado Territory* (1949); or subsequent handling of the same intellectual properties by different auteurs, as in the case of Douglas Sirk ‘covering’ several melodramas first filmed by John Stahl.

While Hollywood’s quixotic desire to standardise success never changes, the manner in which it attempts to do so does. In recent years we’ve had our vocabulary enriched with the introduction of the term ‘reboot’, which for a time was rarely seen outside of the company of its bosom friend ‘gritty’. It comes from computing, where ‘reboot’ refers to turning a computer off and on again, usually in order to troubleshoot or work around an impasse in the operating system. In showbiz, it signifies a new start with a clean slate for an established property – I first saw it being used in reference to comic book-based franchises that, either because of initial failure to develop satisfactory traction with audiences, the arrival at a perceived cul-de-sac with the original talent, or the wear of time on performers, were taken back to the drawing board. The phenomenon began in earnest with Christopher Nolan’s *Batman Begins* (2005), as gritty as they come, and has continued at an urgent pace through the following decade, with Andrew Garfield’s *The Amazing Spider-*

Man (2012) following a decade after Tobey Maguire’s *Spider-Man* (2002), now both to be supplanted by Tom Holland’s take on the web-spinner.

There is a sense, however, that *The Force Awakens*, *Creed* and *Jurassic World* represent something new, a novel twist on what Bordwell calls “the popular demand for the same again, but different”. Various writers, noting the appearance of these sequels that walk like remakes, have tried to work out a definition of what precisely is going on. ScreenCrush’s Matt Singer, looking at much the same crop of 2015 titles addressed herein, coined the term ‘legacy-quel’, citing such variously successful passing-of-the-torch precedents as *Tron: Legacy* (2010) and Abrams’s own *Star Trek* (2009). At the Den of Geek website I find an attempt to coin the term ‘nostalgia-make’, which doesn’t seem destined to last. For my part I’ll go ahead and suggest the ‘re-quel’. (I know, I know, it needs work.)

Detaching franchises from specific talent, these movies facilitate the baton passage of characters and cinematic worlds from one generation to the next. They represent a concentration on proven, yet pliable, character properties which can act as infinitely renewable resources, owned by the studio and therefore not beholden to the tyranny of a single creator or star. It’s illustrative to look at three successful instalments of ongoing film series in 2015: *Spectre* was Eon Productions’ 24th film in its James Bond franchise, which practically created the model for modern, deathless movie series. *Furious 7* wasn’t shut down by the unexpected death of star Paul Walker, and even enjoyed a box-office boost because of it. And though *Mission: Impossible – Rogue Nation* continued the series’ game of directorial round-robin, it comes the nearest of the above to having an essential authorial presence on set in the person of Tom Cruise, whose modern-day Doug Fairbanks stuntwork anchors the series.

George Miller’s *Mad Max: Fury Road* was another out-

lier among last year's multiplex offerings, for with it the 70-year-old Miller was revisiting a world he'd invented with 1979's *Mad Max*, and never relinquished control of in the intervening years. In the case of *The Force Awakens*, by contrast, one almost sensed a collective sigh of relief at these beloved characters having been wrested away from Lucas, as though this fictional universe had come to mean too much to too many people to be left entirely to the whims of a bearded eccentric, and that the only way to save this franchise was to get the copyright away from their irresponsible owner. One Huffington Post writer even praised *The Force Awakens* as "a reverent homage" from "someone who can see more clearly than even its creator what made it so special to so many people".

Under the reign of Bob Iger, chairman and CEO since 2005, Disney has been at the vanguard of vacuuming up intellectual properties, and the box office of *The Force Awakens* was only one aspect of the corporation's banner year. Having purchased Marvel Entertainment for \$4 billion in 2009, Disney also saw tidy profits last year from *Avengers: Age of Ultron* and *Ant-Man*, with the metastatising 'Marvel Cinematic Universe' now preparing to enter phase three of its world conquest plan. It wasn't always this way: around the time that Marvel was making its first clumsy attempts at big-screen crossover in the early 90s, superstar artist Todd McFarlane broke away with great fanfare to co-found Image Comics, based on the principal of creator-owned properties. Today, however, the future seems to belong to the old bullpen atelier model, where the house owns the popular character properties and parcels them out among faithful employees – an approach Disney exemplifies. The secret of Disney's success has been "its ability to get its hands on new characters capable of bringing fans back again and again", in the words of a recent company profile in the *Economist*.

"Before video," Paul Schrader was once quoted as saying, "it was a lot easier to knock things off because no one else had seen them." After Web 2.0, though, there's almost an expectation to knock things off precisely because audiences know the originals. The feeling that pop culture is sagging under the burden of its own accumulated past, as the entertainments of previous generations have become more easily available than ever through a plethora of one-click services, is not limited to the world of film. In his 2011 book *Retromania: Pop Culture's Addiction to Its Own Past*, music critic Simon Reynolds described

In the case of 'The Force Awakens', one almost sensed a collective sigh of relief at these beloved characters having been wrested away from George Lucas

FRIENDS REUNITED
Like cinema, television has also witnessed the recycling of recent cult properties: *Arrested Development*, *The X-Files* and *Twin Peaks* – as well as 'world building' from established freestanding films, such as *Fargo* (below)

what he believed was the slow smothering of pop by the nostalgia industry. And while the golden age of American serial television has been critically trumpeted near and far, as streaming services get into the original content business, we see the recycling of many of the last two decades' cult properties: *Arrested Development*, *The X-Files*, *Twin Peaks*, even *Full House* – as well as further expansions of the Marvel universe, or 'world building' from established freestanding films, such as *Fargo*.

The silver lining here is that any attempt to predict and standardise results in the movie business is doomed to failure from the outset. Even discounting the inevitable changes in public appetites, you can't make the same movie over again, any more than you can step in the same river twice. No matter how carefully an established narrative template is hewed to, an infinity of variables are set in motion every time a new set of talent comes together on a shoot. The same-yet-different nature of the sequel or remake, like genre work, allows for minor variances, pleasurable and instructive, within a structure of repetition (Gus Van Sant's 1998 shot-for-shot *Psycho* experiment is an extreme example.) In the case of many of the films under discussion, the most obvious variations have been in shifting the race and gender identity of key characters, at a time when representation seems to be the issue that most galvanizes the rank-and-file moviegoing public. *Creed* fiddles with the dynamics of class and race in the original *Rocky* (1976), released six months before *Star Wars*, letting an African-American fighter raised with a silver spoon step into the shoes of Stallone's working-class Italian-American lumox. *Mad Max: Fury Road* dispensed with the star of the original trilogy, Mel Gibson, and downgraded Max to second-banana status behind Charlize Theron's Imperator Furiosa. *The Force Awakens* gives central roles to a woman, Daisy Ridley, and a black man, John Boyega, while Carrie Fisher's Princess Leia is now the more gender-neutral *General* Leia. Paul Feig, a specialist in female-driven comedies, is rebooting *Ghostbusters* with a cast of comedienne to great fanfare. Support for a black James Bond has gathered in recent years, while a minor hubbub surrounded Holland's casting as Spider-Man, as Marvel had already introduced a black Spider-Man in comics, in the person of Miles Morales.

Demographics are influential in other ways as well. The emphasis on originality is a particular concomitant of Western individualism – as Donald Richie notes in his landmark study *The Japanese Film*, "repetition for its own sake" has a well-established place in Japanese dramaturgy and cinema – and it stands to reason that as Hollywood makes movies for the whole wide world, this expectation may be less of a priority. While it would take scads of unavailable stats and cinematics to conclusively prove that our current pop cinema is any more or less generic than that of ten, 30 or 60 years previous, I would chance to say that, if nothing else, character properties have become more durable. Han Solo and Rocky Balboa are both pushing 40, and it's hard to find a precedent for that sort of lifespan outside of animation. In movies as in politics, we haven't left the dynastic age, and the eternal hero with a thousand faces may be limited to fewer and fewer bankable names. **S**

i *Creed*, *Point Break* and *Star Wars: The Force Awakens* are out now in UK cinemas. *Secret in Their Eyes* is released on 26 February



PAPA DU CINEMA

François Truffaut's classic book of early 1960s interviews with Alfred Hitchcock sought to reveal to the world the true extent of the great director's artistry. Half a century on, Kent Jones's documentary 'Hitchcock/Truffaut' reassesses the significance of their brief encounters

By Henry K. Miller

The publication of François Truffaut's *Le Cinéma selon Alfred Hitchcock* in late 1966 stands as a halfway mark in the history of film culture. It was 100 years ago, in the summer of 1916, that Cecil B. DeMille's *The Cheat* (1915) opened in Paris, and Colette declared that "a movie theatre has become an art school". Every evening at the Omnia-Pathé, she claimed, "writers, painters, composers, and dramatists come and come again to sit, contemplate, and comment, in low voices, like pupils". What they contemplated on the Boulevard Montmartre, as the battles of the Somme and Verdun raged not all that far away to the north and east, was the "pleasure of seeing the crude *ciné* groping toward perfection". Fifty years later, Truffaut's book, carefully edited from interviews conducted mostly in 1962, presented the cinema as "an art form, on a par with literature", and Hitchcock, who had himself become a cineaste *avant la lettre* during the war years, as "the most complete film-maker of all".

Kent Jones's film *Hitchcock/Truffaut* reconstructs Truffaut's campaign to "free Hitchcock from his reputation as a light entertainer" and have him recognised as an artist; but another 50 years have passed since then, 

THE ODD COUPLE

When François Truffaut wrote to Alfred Hitchcock asking to spend eight days with him in 1962, he believed it would be 'a pretext for me to educate myself' and an opportunity for 'everyone who makes films to be able to learn something from it'

PHOTOGRAPHY BY PHILIPPE HALSMAN



and as well as telling the story, Jones has to remake the case in the present. For Jones, *Vertigo* (1958) and *Psycho* (1960), two of the most recently released of Hitchcock's films at the time of the interviews, help define a watershed in American movie history, dividing the age of the studio system, which began in earnest in DeMille's day and was cracking apart by the time of *Vertigo*, from the less coherent era which *Psycho*, essentially an independent production, helped usher in. For Martin Scorsese, one of Jones's interviewees, *Psycho* introduced a novel uncertainty into moviegoing; but, as he says, that sense of uncertainty was not confined to the movies, and over the decades it has permeated wider culture, throwing into question precisely the terms Truffaut thought in. *Hitchcock/Truffaut* is about what endures.

From the outset, Jones places the emphasis on craft – in filmmaking, but also in book production. An early sequence begins with audio of Hitchcock musing on the question of why certain scenes hold up through the decades, played over the scene under discussion, the climactic murder in *Sabotage* (1936), then cuts to show the same scene laid out shot by shot in the book, with David Fincher on the soundtrack testifying to its educational virtues. The book, product of four years' work by Truffaut and his interpreter and co-editor Helen Scott, is rightly treated as an aesthetic object, a benchmark for film-book illustration that is sadly rarely achieved today. Jones's choice of clips is superb, notably giving the silent period its due; often shorn of their narrative context, they amply demonstrate the power of the image to communicate without it. The film itself is brilliantly edited by Rachel Reichman, with an attention to detail that is worthy of its subject, implicitly supporting Jones's thesis.

SHIFTING FORTUNES

Although Truffaut's book, as Jones presents it, stands as a monument to film form, it didn't begin as one. In her 2008 study *Cross-Channel Perspectives*, Leila Wimmer describes it as "the last building block of the critical system that Truffaut had been busy laying out since his notorious polemical text of January 1954 in defence of auteur cinema", ie, his *Cahiers du cinéma* essay 'A certain tendency of French cinema', and the book's roots can be traced back further still. While the notion that Hitchcock was seen as a light entertainer before *Cahiers* took note of him is a simplification, his reputation was at a low ebb in the late 1940s. The leading critics lamented his decline since his departure for Hollywood in 1939. This magazine's editor at the time, Gavin Lambert, characterised *Under Capricorn* (1949) as "heavy but hollow" and *Stage Fright* (1950) as "slow and laborious"; André Bazin, then a freelance critic, made similar complaints in *L'Ecran français*. As James M. Vest recounts in his 2003 book *Hitchcock and France: The Forging of an Auteur*, the case for the defence was made by the young critics who would later join Bazin on *Cahiers*, founded in 1951: Eric Rohmer (or Maurice Schérer as he then was) and Jacques Rivette.

The front page of the first issue of Rohmer's short-lived, small-circulation *Gazette du cinéma*, published in 1950, featured an appreciation of *Rope* (1948) by Rohmer himself, and an issue of October that year included a review by Rivette of *Under Capricorn* which introduced what would become for the *Cahiers* critics, including Truffaut, Hitchcock's defining authorial trait: the transfer of guilt.

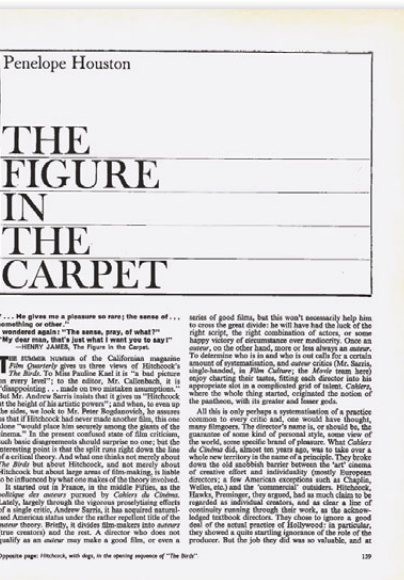
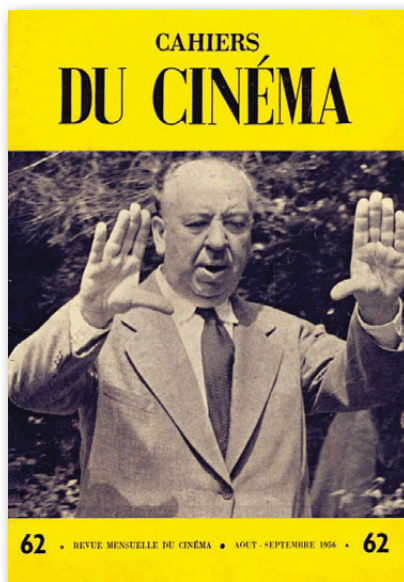
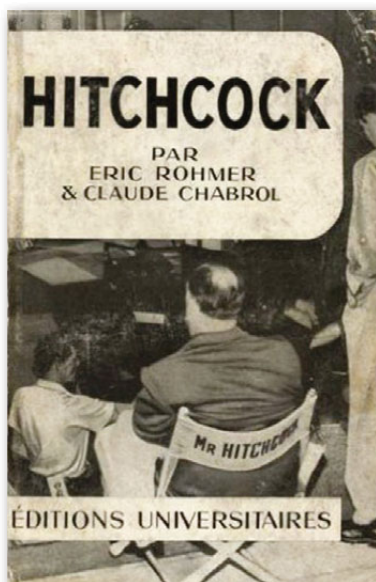
In Truffaut's view, Hitchcock was far more conscious of the seriousness of his themes than he let on, but 'revels in being misunderstood' and 'loathes having to explain himself'

Three years later, Rohmer's *Cahiers* essay 'Of three films and a certain school', an important early statement of the *politique des auteurs*, described Hitchcock's theme in *I Confess* (1953), an equally unloved film elsewhere, as the cinema's "one great theme": "the opposition of two orders – one natural, the other human; one material, the other spiritual; one mechanical, the other free; one of the appetite, the other of heroism or grace". In other words, the *Cahiers* line had a strong Catholic flavour. The recurring image which Rohmer treasured in Hitchcock's films was the revelation of "the heightened scruples of a conscience that was suddenly rejuvenated at the point of strangulation".

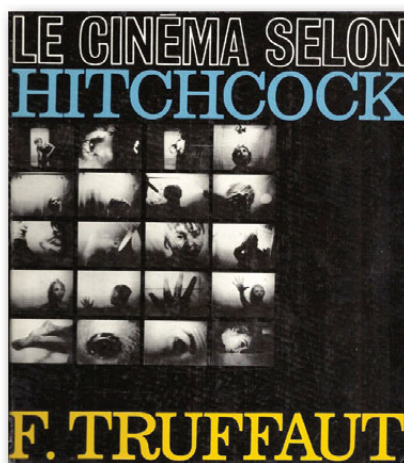
Truffaut's notorious essay, one of his very first *Cahiers* contributions, appeared shortly afterwards. A few months later, on 28 June 1954, in Suite 104–5 of the Hotel George V, not far from the *Cahiers* offices on the Champs-Élysées, came an event which, as Truffaut reported the following month, "will hold such a place in the history of cinema that the readers of *Cahiers* will not be surprised when we keep coming back to it". The event was a press conference given by Hitchcock, in France to shoot *To Catch a Thief* (1954), which gave Truffaut and Claude Chabrol, also a recent addition to the *Cahiers* team, their first opportunity to meet the master.

Some weeks earlier, Bazin, still a Hitchcock sceptic, had interviewed Hitchcock in Nice and in Cannes, and attempted to persuade him to confirm the younger critics' theories about his "constant and profound message". Although Bazin was comfortable with the idea that "a work of art escapes its creator and bypasses his conscious intentions", and allowed that Hitchcock had been blindsided by his questions, which "had little in common with what he was accustomed to in American interviews", he was nonetheless disconcerted by Hitchcock's "instinctive irony", his relative ignorance of theological matters, and his attempts to change the subject to the "simple formal problems" (Bazin's words) posed by *Rear Window* (1954), his most recently completed film. But when he raised the idea of the "transfer of personality", Bazin claimed, "I saw him touched, for the first and only time in the interview, by an unforeseen and unforeseeable idea".

Truffaut and Chabrol were thus prepared, and determined to push the "crafty dissembler" further. As Chabrol recounted, having failed to obtain the answers they wanted in the press conference, he phoned Hitchcock and managed to secure a brief private audience by startling him with the question, "What is the figure in your carpet?" ("The Figure in the carpet" is the title of a Henry James story in which a critic tries to discover the secret meaning hidden in a writer's works). Chabrol came away reasonably satisfied that Hitchcock was, despite his evasions, a sincere Catholic artist who "has always sought, with so much care and modesty, to conceal" his Catholicism. Truffaut, however, was still displeased by Hitchcock's answers, and when the interviews appeared in the October 1954 *Cahiers*, the magazine's first 'Hitchcock issue', his contribution, '*Un trousseau de fausses clés*' (later translated as 'Skeleton keys'), addressed Bazin, his editor and surrogate father directly: "Hitchcock lied to you." In Truffaut's view, Hitchcock was far more conscious of the seriousness of his themes – above all "this basic theme of exchange" – than he let on, but "revels in being misunderstood" and "loathes having to explain himself".



STATE OF THE ART
Although the *Cahiers* critics, including Truffaut in his book of interviews (right) and Rohmer and Chabrol in their study of the director (top left), were influential in raising Hitchcock's profile as an artist, *Sight & Sound's* editor Penelope Houston pointed out in a major 1963 critique of the *Cahiers* line (above), that Hitch had already been widely lionised as a master in the 1930s



"He must realise, however," Truffaut went on, "that one day he will have to behave like his characters who assure their salvation by admitting this." Whether or not Hitchcock was aware of this slightly alarming challenge from the 22-year-old Truffaut, he continued to submit to his questioning through the 1950s. Their first sustained encounter, in January 1955, began with a farcical episode in which Truffaut and Chabrol, as Truffaut more than once recalled, "fell into an icy pond at the Studio Saint-Maurice under the gaze, at first mocking and then compassionate, of the master of anguish", destroying their borrowed tape recorder. When they reconvened at Hitchcock's hotel, he seemed almost primed to make his confession, describing a planned film in the spirit of *I Confess*, to do with a falsely accused man who is saved from punishment only by the intervention of fate or some other power – a film which might have been designed to embody what Truffaut, in his review of *To Catch a Thief*, called Hitchcock's "perennial themes: interchangeability, the reversed crime, moral and almost physical identification between two human beings".

The film was, of course, *The Wrong Man* (1956), and by the time Hitchcock shot it he was fond enough of Truffaut to invite him to New York to observe the shoot. Truffaut did not make the journey, but the film marked the high point of *Cahiers*'s relationship with its director. In his review, Truffaut described its ending, in which the innocent man's face is superimposed over that of the guilty, discovered at the last minute, as "certainly the most beautiful shot in Hitchcock's work and it summarizes all of it. It is the transfer of culpability, the theme of the double, already present in his first English movies, and still present in all his later ones, improved, enriched, and deepened from film to film." This idea of Rivette's, adapted by other hands over the years, became the keynote of Rohmer and Chabrol's book *Hitchcock*, which was published at the end of 1957 and likewise treated *The Wrong Man* as the culmination of Hitchcock's career.

The French critics could have been forgiven for taking the credit: they certainly took the blame. *Sight & Sound* critics like Lambert and Lindsay Anderson had contributed to *Cahiers* in its early years, but on the occasion of its first Hitchcock issue, the latter wrote that it "seems now to have been almost completely taken over by the covey of bright young things whose eccentric enthusiasms, paraded so generously in recent issues, have already sadly impaired its reputation". When *The Wrong Man* arrived, *Sight & Sound's* newly installed editor Penelope Houston wrote that "one even begins to wonder whether Hitchcock has not come slightly under the spell of those French intellectual critics who are always reading deeply symbolic interpretations into his work, finding a fatal mystical fascination in *I Confess* or *Under Capricorn*".

These judgements are liable to raise a counter-sneer from the present. We are all Hitchcocko-Hawksians now, or so we are led to believe, and what were once eccentric enthusiasms now constitute the canon. How the success of the *Cahiers* critics as filmmakers at the turn of the 1960s – none more sensational than Truffaut – made their once-controversial *politique* conventional wisdom across the Channel and the Atlantic is a much told tale. But, as Houston pointed out in 1963, in a major critique of the *Cahiers* line which she titled "The

figure in the carpet', Hitchcock was a special case; unlike most of the other directors being championed by the auteurs, his international reputation was established in the 1930s. There was, she wrote, "general agreement that he is a master; and immense areas of disagreement as to just where his mastery lies, and in which films it is most persuasively demonstrated".

In practice this often boiled down to a contest between British and American Hitchcock. As Wimmer's book shows, Anglophobia was part of the young *Cahiers* critics' challenge to the critical establishment, and lies behind Truffaut's ignorant but influential comment about there being "a certain incompatibility between the terms 'cinema' and 'Britain'", the Hitchcock book's most damaging legacy, thankfully challenged by Jones's film, which includes a number of remarkable shots from the British period. It is almost certainly the case that the British and American critics of the 1950s underrated Hitchcock's best films from that decade, as Houston more or less admitted; but it is far from clear that either the particular favourites of the *Cahiers* critics or their manner of appreciating them resonate now – or even in the supposed heyday of auteurism. To make the latter point, Houston quoted a passage from Rohmer and Chabrol's book which argued that the significance of *Rear Window* "cannot be grasped without a positive reference to Christian dogma".

The essential films for *Cahiers* – *Under Capricorn* and *I Confess*, the films in which, Truffaut wrote in 1954, "that which I dare, without laughing, to call the message of Hitchcock, finds purest and proudest expression", and *The Wrong Man* – are not widely seen in the same light today. *Hitchcock/Truffaut* barely touches upon the former pair; but this reflects a change in Truffaut's priorities during *Le Cinéma selon Alfred Hitchcock*'s long gestation. In the book, and on the tape, it is Hitchcock who raises his Jesuit education in relation to *I Confess* – albeit negatively – and Truffaut who casts doubt upon it. When Truffaut mentions the "systematic pattern that runs through all of your work", it is merely that "you have consistently chosen to limit yourself to those film elements that are visually inspiring or that have a dramatic potential". While Hitchcock allows that his Catholic upbringing must have influenced his choice of subjects, he largely rejects Truffaut's idea, fundamental to the "exchange of guilt" thesis, that his work is "strongly permeated by the concept of original sin". For Hitchcock, his innocent men on the run were really innocent. Truffaut delved deeper into this side of Hitchcock than anyone else had to that date, but reached something like Bazin's original conclusion, that Hitchcock's recurring interest in the "exchange of guilt" was instinctive rather than intentional. At any rate Truffaut could no longer assert that Hitchcock had concealed some grand design deliberately; rather, his spiritual confusion seemed genuine.

One reason for this change in emphasis may be that Truffaut, whatever he had written in *Cahiers*, was less of a theologian than his colleagues – he later called Rohmer and Chabrol's book "a little too excessively intellectual" – and that his connection with Hitchcock lay elsewhere. In an autobiographical piece of 1975 he wrote of his youth: "Unlike most moviegoers my own age, I didn't identify with the heroes, but with the underdog and, in general, with any character who was in the wrong. That's why Alfred Hitchcock's movies, devoted to fear, won me over

Truffaut wrote, 'I didn't identify with the heroes, but with the underdog. That's why Alfred Hitchcock's movies, devoted to fear, won me over from the start'

from the start; and after Hitchcock, Jean Renoir, whose work is directed toward understanding..." As Jones notes, whereas Hitchcock's father supposedly had him locked up in a police cell "for five or ten minutes", Truffaut had been locked up more than once, for longer spells. There was also, of course, the fact that Truffaut had become a director, radically altering his perspective.

'THE GREATEST FILM DIRECTOR IN THE WORLD'

Truffaut's letter to Hitchcock asking for eight days of his time, dated 2 June 1962, would inevitably have flattered its recipient, but its focus on film form is nonetheless striking. Summarizing his proposed introduction, he wrote that his governing conceit would be that "if, overnight, the cinema had to do without its soundtrack and become once again a silent art, then many directors would be forced into unemployment, but, among the survivors, there would be Alfred Hitchcock, and everyone would realise at last that he is the greatest film director in the world". Along the same lines, he wrote to Scott shortly afterwards that the interview would be "a pretext for me to educate myself". On another occasion he told her, "I'd like everyone who makes films to be able to learn something from it, and also everyone whose dream it is to become a film-maker." Thus the "simple formal problems" which Bazin resented Hitchcock for concentrating upon became the core of the interview.

The discussion went both ways. In a section of the interview left out of the book but included by Jones (and recently transcribed in *Hitchcock on Hitchcock, Volume 2*), Truffaut describes his frustration with his own lack of planning on his debut feature *The 400 Blows* (1959), and Hitchcock makes him break down and reconstruct one particular sequence without dialogue – exactly the lesson Truffaut wanted the book to teach – before dictating his own version. The exchange was not conducted on equal terms, however. After Hitchcock saw *Jules et Jim* (1962), Truffaut wrote to Scott that he "cannot genuinely like a film which was shot in ignorance and defiance of the laws which he himself has been laying down for thirty-five years to keep audiences on the edge of their seats". Those laws distinguished the auteurs from the

GUILTY PLEASURES
The Hitchcock films which the *Cahiers du cinéma* critics had the highest regard for, such as *Under Capricorn* (1949) and *I Confess* (1953, below), are not seen in the same light today



BE NATIONAL ARCHIVE (2)

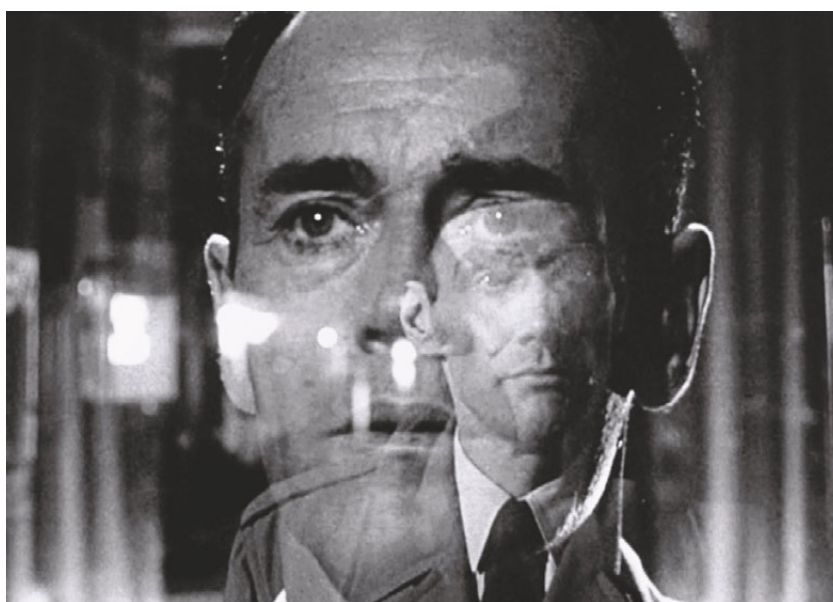
metteurs en scène; as Truffaut told her later, “Arthur Penn, who films every scene from twelve different angles, *out of ignorance*, can *learn everything* from such a book and the same applies to Huston, Wyler, Stevens.”

William Wyler and George Stevens, neither of them much younger than Hitchcock, made their last films in 1970. The book’s ideal readers would instead be those who came to Hitchcock almost simultaneously with Truffaut and the *nouvelle vague*, represented in Jones’s film by Scorsese, Peter Bogdanovich – himself the author of an important Hitchcock interview book – and Paul Schrader, among other things screenwriter of Brian De Palma’s *Obsession* (1976). De Palma, absent from Jones’s film apparently because of the likelihood of overlap with Noah Baumbach and Jake Paltrow’s documentary *De Palma* (2015), is almost certainly the first filmmaker to have included a shot of Truffaut’s book in one of his films: a copy made a cameo in *Greetings* (1968), filmed only months after its US publication. And De Palma was also the director who most thoroughly absorbed Hitchcock’s lessons – not from *Under Capricorn* or *I Confess*, but from the films which endure: *Rear Window*, *Vertigo* and *Psycho*.

In De Palma’s hands, Hitchcock’s interrogation of point of view, his flagrant manipulation of filmic time and space, and his recurrent interest in the instability of identity, were all reworked to treat the historical epoch Scorsese describes in Jones’s film: that of Vietnam, the Kennedy assassination and the new mass media and surveillance technologies which have gone on proliferating over the 50-plus years of De Palma’s career, most notably in *Greetings, Hi, Mom!* (1970), *Blow Out* (1981), *Casualties of War* (1989), *Snake Eyes* (1998) and *Redacted* (2007). Those same decades of postmodernity saw Truffaut’s terms ‘artist’ and ‘entertainer’ revised, elided, certainly transformed; but perhaps this is to overstate their solidity in Hitchcock’s heyday.

His formative years in the early 20th century were as turbulent as any that followed; and his films registered the shock of the new well before *Psycho*. The same shock-waves were already in the process of transforming the cultural field when Colette observed the crowd at the Omnia-Pathé at the height of the Great War; it is arguable that the *Cahiers* critics of the 1950s – easily in the case of Rohmer and Chabrol – were attempting to recover a largely imagined past of stable values. The criterion of art which they used in their writings on Hitchcock was by no means as universal as they made out: the same T.S. Eliot who praised thrillers in the 1920s wrote that art was “not a substitute for philosophy or theology or religion”, and that its unique function was “not intellectual but emotional”. It was Raymond Durnat, in his 1974 book *The Strange Case of Alfred Hitchcock*, who identified Hitchcock with Eliot’s *fin de siècle* forebears, the symbolists, who extolled the notion of a purely aesthetic realm, unencumbered by morality, writing that his films amounted to the “orderly orchestration of sensation”, and that Hitchcock, “as an aesthete, is an epicure of suspense, of terror, bringing us near the pain-pleasure ambivalence”, and so part of a lineage that included Baudelaire and Wilde. Truffaut himself came to group Hitchcock “among such artists of anxiety as Kafka, Dostoevsky, and Poe”.

None of these positions are permanent; nor are they wholly superseded. “Isn’t it a fascinating design?” as Hitchcock asks at one point in the interview. “One



could study it forever.” Truffaut recognised as early as 1954 that the “permanence of themes [...] is not irrefutable proof of his genius. In another this would reveal an ‘idée fixe’ and an incapacity for self-renewal.” *Hitchcock/Truffaut* is a contribution to a continuing tradition rather than a mere tribute to an older one. Indeed, much of the book, published before any full biography had appeared, now seems redundant, though there are still insights into Hitchcock’s attitudes – towards British cinema, for example – which have not been pursued. Just as Truffaut and Scott were responsible for substantial “rewording, rearranging, and compressing” of the transcript, as Janet Bergstrom has demonstrated in her essay ‘Lost in translation? Listening to the Hitchcock-Truffaut interview’, so Jones has distilled his own version, using passages not included in the book and treating his talking heads rather as Hitchcock used actors: as part of a larger structure. Form endures, and with it the quality of seriousness. 

LESSON OF THE MASTER
Sabotage (1936, top) was used by Truffaut in his book to show Hitchcock’s extraordinary mastery of the visual form, while the French director proclaimed the superimposed faces in *The Wrong Man* (1956, above) as ‘certainly the most beautiful shot in Hitchcock’s work’

 **Hitchcock/Truffaut is released in UK cinemas on 4 March and is reviewed on page 78**

ISLAND OF LOST SOULS

In Luca Guadagnino's 'A Bigger Splash', Ralph Fiennes gives a blistering performance as a motormouth rock impresario seeking to win back his former girlfriend. Here the director explains the evolution of the project and why he believes cinema is losing its identity as a visual medium

By Nick James



ROCK AND A HARD PLACE
Matthias Schoenaerts
and Tilda Swinton (right)
play Paul and Marianne, a
couple whose recuperative
idyll on the Italian island of
Pantelleria is interrupted
by Marianne's former lover,
played by Ralph Fiennes
(below left) and his young
daughter, played by Dakota
Johnson (below right)



A fascination with sensuality and decadence among the well-off is what marks much of the work of Luca Guadagnino. It's what links his estimable 2009 arthouse hit *I Am Love* with his new film *A Bigger Splash*. That and a wish to expose the hidden dynamics of human interaction when conflicting desires within a group are exposed. *I Am Love* followed Emma (Tilda Swinton), the Russian-born matriarch of an Italian textile manufacturing dynasty of three generations, as she has a torrid affair with a handsome, earthy chef in the midst of negotiations to sell the family business to foreign investors. While her captains of industry squabble, the dynasty's scions find themselves in different ways.

A Bigger Splash, however, confines itself mostly to a tight foursome. The film is a remake of *La Piscine* (1969), Jacques Deray's Côte d'Azur thriller of sexual jealousy, which brought together Alain Delon, Romy Schneider, Maurice Ronet and Jane Birkin in a frozen moment of perfect 1960s bossa nova cool. Guadagnino's version keeps the centrality of the swimming pool but is much more enigmatic and complex in the way he plays with his rather different locations, noting odd details that build an embattled atmosphere.

In a chic hilltop villa on the rocky Italian island of Pantelleria, stadium-filling rock star Marianne Lane (Swinton), having completely lost her voice, has holed up with her lover Paul (Matthias Schoenaerts), a documentary filmmaker. Intruding into this apparent idyll on impulse and without warning comes Harry (Ralph Fiennes), a rock impresario and Marianne's former lover, bringing in tow Penelope (Dakota Johnson), a young daughter he didn't know existed until recently.

Harry is an old-style rock hedonist, a motormouth who's always up for adventure and sardonic frankness. He very quickly makes it known that he's come to win Marianne back. Marianne, though often amused by and possibly susceptible to Harry's charms – and Ralph Fiennes's singalong Jagger-fired performance of The Rolling Stones hit 'Emotional Rescue' is a real jaw-dropper – wishes she could speak to make her feelings clear. Swinton personifies her as quizzically unsure what to do. Paul, meanwhile, becomes more guarded, having known Harry of old, and in the meantime Penelope seems content to lay out in the sun and watch it all from behind her shades. The fact that Pantelleria is marginally closer to the coastline of Tunisia than to Sicily, soon becomes manifest as migrants fleeing north from Africa turn up on the rocks among the coves where Paul likes to hike.

With Guadagnino, you get the sense that his precise and exquisite work in luxury videos for brands such as Cartier, Ferragamo and Sergio Rossi et al operates as a sketchbook for the bigger ideas on display in *A Bigger Splash*, and it seems that his 2011 debut as an opera director for Verdi's *Falstaff* in Verona also helped with his thinking for the film. Guadagnino seems tremendously at ease filming the illusions of commercial paradises. This ensemble of actors has pleased him so much that he's apparently asked them all to return for his remake of Dario Argento's classic horror film *Suspiria* [1977], to be shot later this year.

On the other hand, he's not happy with the general state of cinema. When I met him for this interview at last year's BFI London Film Festival, he was in amused and expansive form despite enduring a long day of encounters with the press. When I asked, as a preamble, what aspects of his film he was sick of talking about, he offered *La Piscine*, so we bypassed that, and pretty soon, as you will see, the director was expressing his reservations about Hollywood, arthouse cinema and much much more in no uncertain terms.

Nick James: Since you've already talked too much about *La Piscine*, let's turn instead to the script.

Luca Guadagnino: I read some of David Kajganich's scripts and I enjoyed them because they stuck closely to the characters and were much less interested in the proceedings – none of that three-act bullshit you usually get when you read the Hollywood scripts that now rule the way we do films. For me, a script should be as little



preordained as possible. In this case, a film about the desires ruling people being unleashed, it was important to see behaviour rather than drama unfolding on the page. So I wanted to work with David to make sure that the script would be about the raw evolution of consequences. Any time he said, "OK, act one ends here," I would say, "I don't know what you're talking about." Once we understood each other on this ground the work became beautiful. People at headquarters were reading the script and saying, "Nothing happens in the first 45 pages," which wasn't true – so much happens in the first 45 pages, but it's behaviour and if you don't sustain this very deep chiselling of action and reaction you can't take the characters where you need to go.

I used to like the kind of commercial films that believed in the arc and three-act drama, but now that the cinema is neglecting its own identity as a visual medium I don't so much. We face three syndromes: first is the talking head, films made up of close-ups of actors dramatising words in the most expected way. Second, there is no interest in form, only in the aesthetic of the shot – a little bit of night light and heavy make-up. This arises out of the mistaken notion that glossy televisual ad and video-clip language means contemporary cinema. Third, arthouse cinema is cornering itself with the idea that to film reality means following an actor around with a handheld camera pointed at their back, with directors not asking themselves, "Where's the point of view?" These syndromes rule festivals. The programmes of the major A-list festivals are put together with a third of this and a third of that and a third of the other and maybe two or three exceptional titles – say, for instance, Hou Hsiao-Hsien's *The Assassin*. For every Hou Hsiao-Hsien, you have several like Thomas Vinterberg's *The Hunt*, a typical talking heads drama that doesn't take a point of view. In the past, even middle-ground directors like Alan Pakula, who is no master, would take a visual and cinematic point of view.

NJ: So you've incorporated that idea into this film?

LG: I hope so, because dialogue is no way to address content. That's a mortal sin. The island, the water, the snake, like everything else, are all part of a mosaic.

NJ: Were there many elements in the script that came after the casting?

LG: The crucial elements were already there: the island of Pantelleria as a crossroads, rock and roll, this nostalgia clouding everything and characters wanting to push through that cloud. But in the original script Marianne Lane was a great movie star and Tilda wasn't meant to be in the movie. When I had the chance to work with her again, she said, "Marianne has too many words. Why is she an actress? Actors carry a sort of vanity. It's not as interesting as the clash you want to portray." So I suggested, "Maybe she should be a musician, like Harry." Jean Renoir said, "Leave the door open to reality." How did we not see that Marianne and Harry, being the glorious couple they once were, had to have come from the same musician background? It's like Henry James's short story 'The figure in the carpet': you don't see what's in front of you. Then Tilda said, "What if the clash happened not to be about two people going after each other with words, but became one in which one person cannot articulate anything because they have no voice?" We took this idea to David. The contrast between motormouth Harry and silent Marianne is a beautiful and classic one.



Auteur cinema is morphing slowly into narcissistic cinema. Hitchcock was very shy about calling himself an auteur. Now everybody claims to be one

When you're making a movie you have to deal with the friction and heaviness of the shoot, which can be really dispiriting. All these human beings are there to collaborate and you must be very open to that. But afterwards you go into the silent, intimate, almost soft moment of editing, where you start writing again. In that moment I become fearful of my narcissism because I might put myself before the movie instead of the movie before myself.

NJ: Do you mean visual self-indulgence?

LG: In general, yes. I think auteur cinema is morphing slowly into narcissistic cinema. Hitchcock was very shy about calling himself an auteur. Now everybody claims to be one.

NJ: Tell me more about the editing.

LG: There's an amazing sequence we shot in the Tate gallery of David Hockney's *A Bigger Splash* painting, which was meant to frame the movie. It was shot by the great Peter Suschitzky, because my DP Yorick Le Saux – another great one – couldn't shoot that day. It was almost like a Straub/Huillet *Une visite au Louvre* idea where you see the face and then you see the painting, and then you go into the movie and you end up again with the painting. I thought it was so cool to have the original painting by Hockney. Yet it was also beautiful when I finally said, "Get rid of it."

NJ: The *Grand Budapest Hotel* [2014] showed Ralph Fiennes to be a terrific comic actor. Here he's playing Harry, this super-confident, exuberant, slightly irritating but also energising clownish figure. How did that come about?

LG: I've always loved Ralph. He gives me strength. You have to nurture your obsessions and cineastic eroticisms and for me he was part of that kind of food. I was stunned by his performance in *Quiz Show* [1994], for instance, and that intellectual upper-class family in that great film led me to the family in *I Am Love*. I saw the trailer for *Grand Budapest Hotel* and I thought, "This guy is light and funny." So we met in Los Angeles and it was really intense. He has this very piercing, very directorial gaze. I felt respect from him when he understood that I wasn't shy about wanting to have a relationship with him. He read the script and he said, "Listen, there's something in this script that reminds me of me. It's interesting that

you had this intuition. I want to do it." Two years before *A Bigger Splash* I had directed Verdi's opera *Falstaff*. I thought about Falstaff a lot in the context of Harry. These people are both at the end of an epoch, but they're still thinking they're in the middle of it.

NJ: Harry's a baby boomer at the end of things.

LG: Exactly. These kinds of vitalistic, erotic, delusional people.

NJ: Did you mention Falstaff to Ralph?

LG: I made some reference to it, but we put a lot of *Falstaff* music in the film. During a key scene at the end, we play the great aria of *Falstaff* in the garden at Windsor. Falstaff thinks he's the most charming man on the planet, but he is an ageing fat man and he wants to seduce the woman. And then you have Tilda. Marianne Lane cannot speak so she's cut from a different comedic cloth, à la Harpo Marx. The manic interaction between these two comedic identities was great to see.

NJ: Did that mean that Matthias Schoenaerts and Dakota Johnson had to pull back a little?

LG: Matthias's character is a brooding sort, cornered into passivity until he finally reacts. Dakota's character is a foreigner on many levels. She's not Italian, she's not known by the group, her father has just met her, the other two didn't know she existed, she's of another generation and she's American. So she finds a comfortable position of distance and voyeurism towards them until she decides she not only wants to look at these older people making fools of each other but wants to manipulate them.

NJ: This is an overtly sexual, overtly melodramatic story, so the political background of Pantelleria is leaked in a little bit at a time.

LG: It was in the script but it grew into an idea of how our characters put the 'other' in perspective. They don't reckon on the individuality of either the massive wall of Marianne's fans at the beginning, or the migrant refugees one of the characters uses to create an alibi. But if you dismiss the individuality of others, what are you left with? That is the film.

NJ: I worry that you have caricatured your countrymen with the hick policeman behaving like a fan with Marianne. How did that go down in Italy?

LG: They truly, truly, truly hated it. And yet they loved



THE SILENT TREATMENT
When Tilda Swinton (below, and with Ralph Fiennes in the film above) joined the project, she suggested to director Luca Guadagnino (opposite) that she change the character he wanted her to play from a talkative movie star to a rock musician who has lost her voice

the candy caramel pop vision of Rome in [Paolo Sorrentino's 2013 film] *The Great Beauty*, which is a self-reflection of a stale hedonism that's not possible any more. The cop in *A Bigger Splash* is an in-joke about our own faults. The real police chief in Pantelleria was the same with us as the one in the movie. Bernardo Bertolucci warned me that it would be criticised for the portrayal of the cop, and I said, "But Bernardo, you know it's truthful." And he said to me, "Sometimes truth is not revolutionary." I disagree. I think they boo it because it is revolutionary.

NJ: How do you think about images? Are elements like the snake that approaches the swimming pool symbolic?

LG: I'm terrified of pretentiousness. Pantelleria is a very rocky place where you can surrender to nature. If you're there, you will definitely bump into snakes. But it's not temptation that's implied, it's more about people ruling the wilderness out of their lives. The two characters who throw the snake away are Paul and Marianne, the ones who want the safety of a bourgeois life. They're not dismissing temptation, they are throwing away what they come from. I am terrified of snakes. So I said, "I want to use snakes because I don't want to be comfortable."

NJ: The Stones' 'Emotional Rescue' was an interesting choice for Harry's standout moment, and the use of other Stones tracks, especially if you compare it to the Bossa Nova of *La Piscine*, really fits with the music of baby boomers, the music that is now more or less over. Was it always the Stones?

LG: It was about rock and roll and rock and roll is The Rolling Stones. I have to pay homage to StudioCanal who let me pursue music that's that expensive.

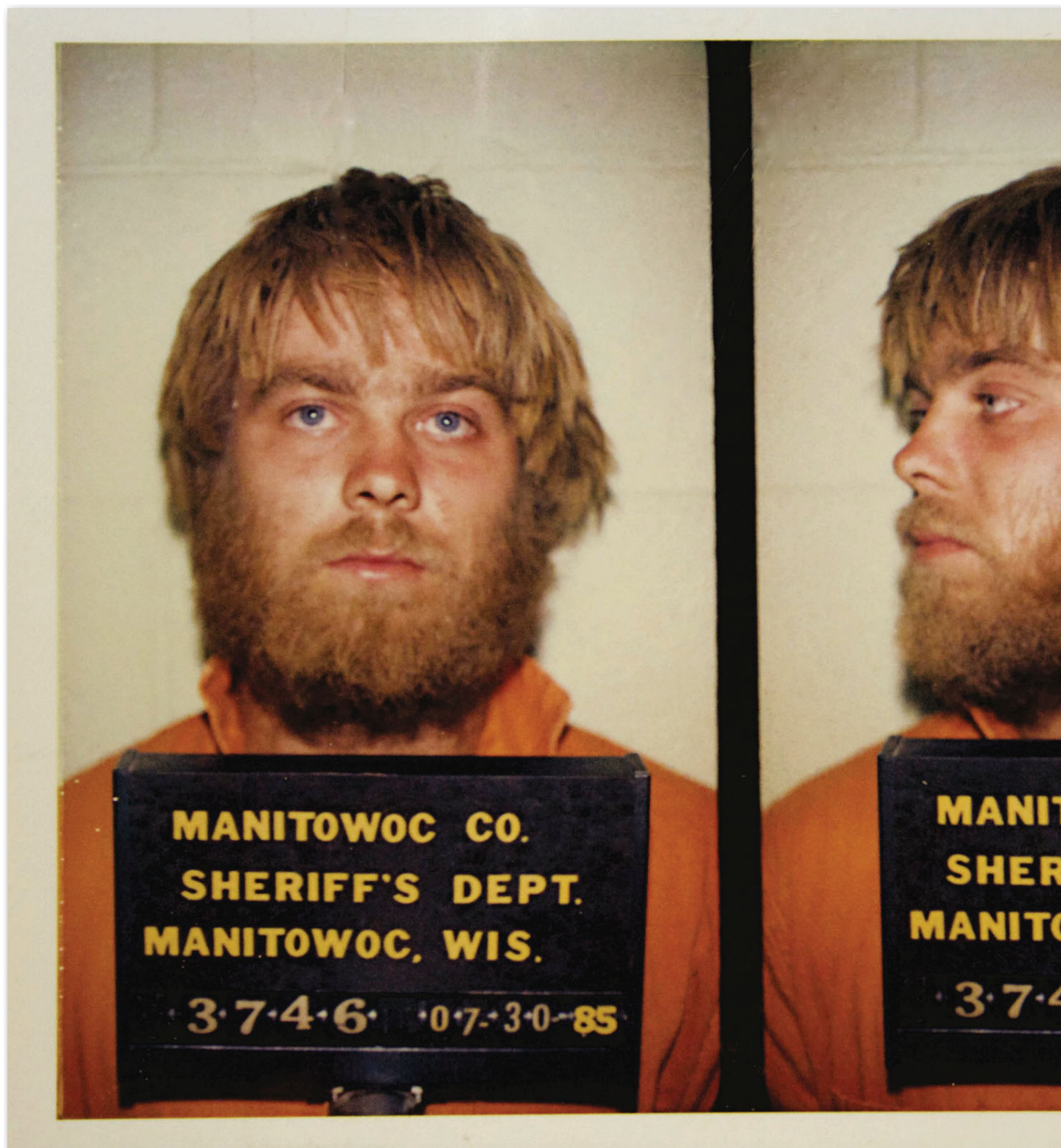
NJ: I was thinking, too, about Paul being in rehab. Everybody in this film has got a corner that they're fighting from.

LG: Completely. Marianne and Paul are trying to survive the damage of a lifestyle by changing and adapting and, by contrast, Harry is trying to piece together the broken things. Penelope is leading herself towards damage, to a trauma. It's about how you hurt yourself, or again, as Harry says, how you are obscene, able to wound or be wounded. Yeah, it's a good topic. 📍

i *A Bigger Splash* is released in UK cinemas on 12 February and is reviewed on page 71



ROUGH JUSTICE
Shortly after DNA evidence helped to free him following 18 years in prison for a sexual assault he did not commit, Steven Avery (below) was arrested again, this time for murder – events that are re-examined in Netflix's *Making a Murderer*



TRIAL AND ERROR

'Making a Murderer', an addictive series that casts doubt on the guilt of a man arrested for murder, has proved a hit with armchair detectives – but while its extended length shows a welcome loosening of TV formats, should its own methods be questioned?

By Eric Hynes

It's tempting to credit the success of *Making a Murderer*, which debuted on Netflix in late 2015, to a savvy exploitation of the culture's sudden hunger for long-form episodic nonfiction. That's certainly part of the equation. Earlier in the year, both HBO's six-part *The Jinx* and public radio's 12-part *Serial* became cultural phenomena, doubtlessly influencing Netflix's release strategy and priming the pump for the ten-part, ten-plus hour *Making a Murderer*. Within days of its release, an already well-covered criminal case from ten years ago became a trending topic on social media, which then became a hot topic on traditional media that now consider social media a primary source of news – even though many of the same outlets had covered the case in real time back in 2006.

But simply chalking it up to the exploitation of a hot trend doesn't address why this particular series has resonated with audiences, nor does it confirm the legitimacy of its long-form approach. That directors Moira Demos and Laura Ricciardi had been working on *Making a Murderer* for ten years, and had resisted the standard feature film format throughout that time, disproves the notion that this was a rush job aiming to cash in on a *Jinx*-primed market. At the very least its success was a confluence of complementary factors, each, for different reasons, worth exploring.

Yet it's also worth stepping back from the pop cultural water cooler to consider what is and isn't new about these series, and what is and isn't new (or successful) about *Making a Murderer* in particular. Long-form documentary storytelling isn't exactly virgin territory, nor is the true crime doc. Now that they've become formally and quite profitably spooned, it's worth wondering what's being served. Is it our binge-addled hunger for more episodes, our Pavlovian attachment to cliffhangers? Or maybe it's our timeless taste for whodunits, our contemporary fascination with conspiracies and armchair adjudications. As trends go, it's an awfully familiar one. Rather than showing us a new way to see or tell stories, long-form true crime accesses something elemental, meeting us where we're hard-wired, poking our brains to make us kick, or click 'Next Episode', on cue.

These impulses and tendencies are deliberately activated by the series, which chronicles



There's nothing wrong with the filmmakers making a case for Avery's innocence, but this can be accomplished without resorting, via music and unkind cutaways, to a demonisation of the other side

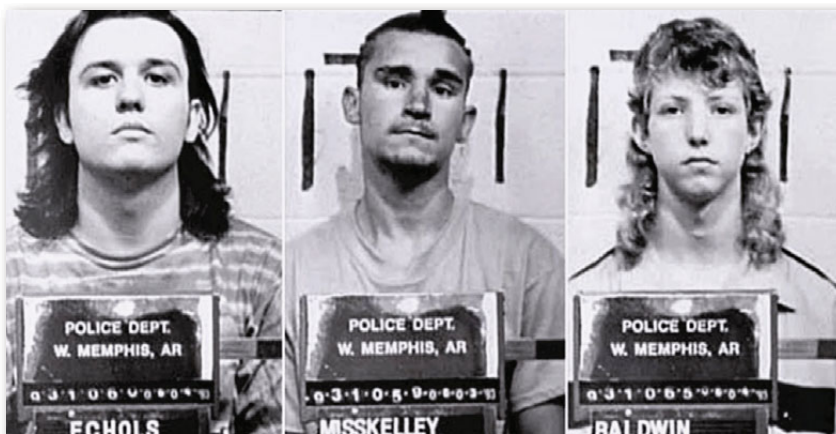
two suspicious convictions of the same man, Steven Avery – the first time for sexual assault, the second for murder, alleged crimes that were committed three decades apart. After nearly two decades of incarceration, and consistent denials of any wrongdoing, DNA evidence overturned his first conviction. Then, before he could complete legal action against the local Wisconsin police department for its handling of the case, he was arrested again, this time for the murder of a woman whose remains were found on his property. In classic serial style, each episode of *Making a Murderer* ends with a cliffhanger, or at least a nod to one. In one, a crucial piece of evidence is introduced; in another, a dastardly villain takes the stand. Invariably, it's a cliffhanger that presupposes we're rooting for Avery.

As with *Serial*, and feature films such as Errol Morris's classic *The Thin Blue Line* (1988) and Joe Berlinger and Bruce Sinofsky's *Paradise Lost* trilogy, the series considers the case of a convicted man. It's a choice that implies that there is an argument against that conviction – and usually proceeds in that manner. It gives the films a forward-leaning quality, driving headlong against waves of injustice. Outrage fuels the production, outrage becomes articulated in the craft, and outrage is what's fomented in the audience. Other viewpoints and arguments may be incorporated into the shape of things, but we wouldn't be revisiting these cases if they were open and shut, if they were beyond such filmic reproach.

To its credit, *Serial* is different on this front, using several of its 12 parts to present evidence and mount arguments against convicted murderer Adnan Syed, and even ending at a place of continuing uncertainty over his innocence or guilt. Helping this along was a serialised method, tailored to the lower-cost, more reactive nature of radio, in which some episodes were still coming together while the series was being aired. It meant that information and evidence could continue to flow in, and the hearts and minds of the programme's creators could evolve in something close to real time.

Extending over 15 years, the *Paradise Lost* films aren't marked by major changes of opinion, but the significant gaps between instalments in the trilogy allow for a deepening portrait of the three convicted child murderers, Damien Echols, Jason Baldwin, and Jessie Misskelley, as well as an accumulation of evidence that points to their innocence. The films functioned as a weapon of gathering power, putting continued attention on the case and playing a part in the three men's eventual release.

PRESUMED INNOCENT
The *Paradise Lost* trilogy of films played a key role in the release of Damien Echols, Jessie Misskelley and Jason Baldwin (below), who had been falsely charged with the 1993 murder of three children in West Memphis, Arkansas



The same can also be said of *The Thin Blue Line*, which catalysed the reopening of a case that eventually saw Randall Adams freed having spent 12 years behind bars after being wrongly convicted of killing a police officer. Yet for all of its effectiveness as the driving force behind Adams's exoneration, Morris's film is also an evocative, freestanding work of art motivated by ideas as much as by outrage. His technique isn't wielded to make us think one thing or another, but rather to think, period. Rather than merely fill in the gaps of a story for which little visual record exists, his *noirish* re-enactments express the subjectivity and fallibility of memory. As with Kurosawa's *Rashomon* (1950), just because something has been visualised in *The Thin Blue Line* doesn't make it an objective truth. Yet what we subjectively see, or recall seeing, can have an objective effect on people's lives.

No such ethical notions inform the re-enactments of *The Jinx: The Life and Deaths of Robert Durst*, in which director Andrew Jarecki illustrates bracing audio testimony with stylised depictions of that testimony. Here it's less about illustrating the subjectivity of memory, and more about assuming that we can't follow what's being conveyed, or feel sufficiently deeply about it, without visual assistance. Not only does it lack the sophistication of Morris's approach, it fundamentally misreads the function of it. One tactic encourages us to think sceptically about what and how we see things; the other coddles us with what it thinks we need or want to see.

There are elements of this mindset in *Making a Murderer*, which doesn't rely heavily on re-enactments but does deploy music to telegraph emotion around what's being said or shown. Throughout the series, ominous electric guitar chords encourage us to feel dread, frustration or empathy for Avery, even as the unspooling of the narrative engenders these emotions quite well without forcing them upon us. As the series gets deeper into Avery's murder trial, this portentous underscoring attends even seemingly banal sightings of the police officers and prosecutors pushing for his conviction, like so many Darth Vaders breathing to the strident tones of John Williams's 'Imperial March'.

As far as this writer is concerned, there's nothing wrong with the filmmakers making a case for their subject's innocence – Morris and Berlinger/Sinofsky certainly did so successfully in their films, and why adhere to balance when a conviction has already tilted the scales so far in the other direction? There's strength in going deep with the defence team, giving us a first-hand, late-night-in-the-living-room view of their strategies and concerns, as well as Avery's own perspective, heard in phone calls from the prison. Demos and Ricciardi aren't required to give us the other side in order for this footage to be valuable – this isn't a hard news story. But this can be accomplished without resorting to a demonisation of the other side, via music, unkind cutaways and pseudo-authoritative graphics, which can grow so pointed as to inspire sympathy for otherwise suspicious characters.

GROWING PAINS

What's simultaneously intriguing and suspicious about this wave of episodic nonfiction is how it's throwing open the doors to extended duration. This certainly debunks the lazy notion that films ought to assume a feature length if they want to be distributed or seen. There

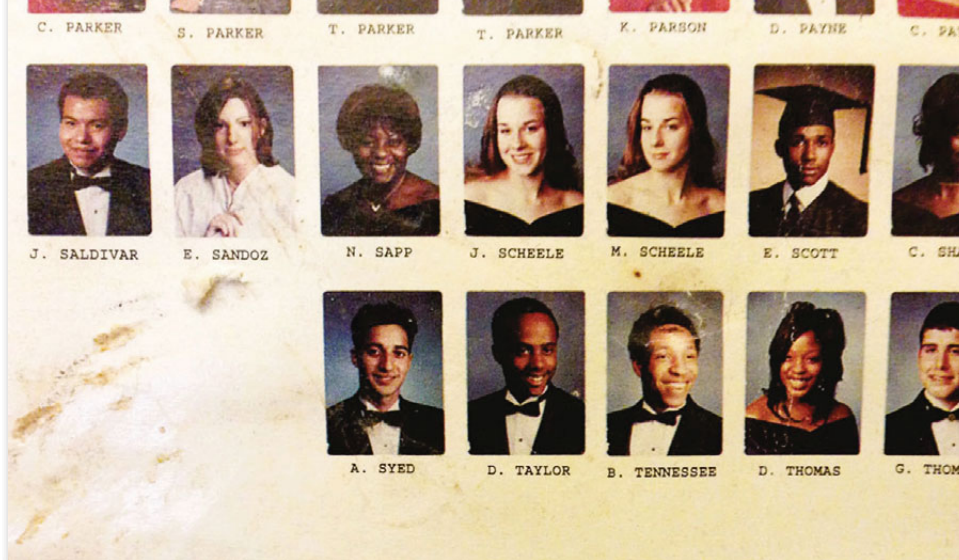
may be market reasons for fashioning features into a 75-105 minute mould – more theatrical screenings per day, a desire to cater for lower attention spans – but it's always been a bit ludicrous to assume that all subjects and stories are best served within that span. So why did Joshua Oppenheimer feel he had to discard a third of *The Act of Killing* for his American theatrical release? The fact that *The Jinx* could stand at nearly five hours, while *Making a Murderer* could exceed ten, and still attract a mass audience, speaks to a loosening of these borders.

But it also speaks to an adaptation to new formats and presentation platforms. As more viewers watch streaming services like Netflix, Amazon and HBO GO, the standard practices of the arthouse cinema circuit and broadcast television schedules cease to apply. When people can watch when, where and as often as they wish, it's a completely different scenario from stacking as many screenings into the Curzon as you can in a single day. Could this mean more films will organically assume their ideal shape? Perhaps, but that's not what's afoot at the moment.

Instead, these long-form crime serials are just conforming to a different template – the ten to 12 episode TV 'season'. There's potential in this, especially for subjects and concepts ideally served by that format. What those subjects and concepts are I don't really know, and I doubt many filmmakers and producers have figured it out yet. In the meantime, we have the creeping feeling that the ten-years-in-production *Making a Murderer* has been tailored to suit not its own essential shape, but the expectation for what constitutes a 'season'.

The series starts with so much momentum, chronicling the entirety of Avery's first trial within the first episode, and the full span of his time as a free man within the second. But then things start to slow down considerably once the murder trial begins, with entire episodes dedicated to different aspects of the trial – the defence strategy, the presentation of evidence, the calling of witnesses – and long stretches given over to minimally edited court recordings, presupposing that we've become so hooked on the case that we're eager to behave as jurors or stenographers, sitting through arguments for what seems like argument's sake. Six hours pass. Then the final two episodes pick up the pace again, briskly focusing on the related trial for Steven's nephew Brendan, and a where-are-they-now check-in with the Avery family. It's awfully easy to imagine a representation of the trial that's one-third of this length, which is already the duration of a longish feature film.

UNDER SUSPICION
Andrew Jarecki's *The Jinx: The Life and Deaths of Robert Durst* undermines its efforts to encourage viewers to think sceptically about what we are seeing with its heavyhanded re-enactments



GUILT TRIP
National Public Radio's *Serial* took a fresh look at the case of student Adnan Syed (above, bottom left, in his school yearbook), who was imprisoned for the murder of his ex-girlfriend in 1999

Making a Murderer doesn't seem organically formed, but rather strategically stretched to keep us around. At times it resembles less a long-form documentary than a listless, vanish-into-the-couch Court TV marathon. During those saggy middle episodes, it's entirely reasonable to dwell on the anti-spectacle of Avery himself, snuck into the top right-hand corner of the standard shot of the defence desk, battling boredom even at his own murder trial. There's something intriguing about a zeitgeist object that tempts boredom, that matches market-tested manipulations with fill-out-the-hour slack. But there's a difference between challenging expectations and patience, and simply hitting a new, externally defined mark, misshapeness be damned.

Yet the series is still so damn addictive. Once you wade in, it's hard to do anything but continue on to the other side. Whether it's film, TV or an audiovisual analogue to a true-crime page turner, the series creates a world that can envelop and disturb you, and is all the more disturbing for being made up of elements of the one we already inhabit. Perhaps that's what rankles about its bloat, lack of subtlety, and single-mindedness about legal redress. If you're going to leg-lock me for ten hours, maybe take some chances with craft, maybe go down avenues that yield little usable evidence but do reveal your own process, maybe launch me into thinking about larger ideas, as Morris did with re-enactments and subjectivity, or even as Jarecki did, to a certain degree, with Durst as a horrifying subject who nevertheless offers up a mad, shambling charisma. It's not actually hard to entrance people via screens, especially if other people you know, or read, are also entranced and talking about it. Okay, you've got me. I want to know what happens. I want to solve the mystery. But now that you've got me, what do you plan to do with me?

The great documentary filmmaker Frederick Wiseman says he's often asked if he'd consider breaking up his notoriously long observational feature films into episodic series. But after half a century of shooting and shaping his films a certain way, there's little reason to adapt simply for the sake of shifting viewing platforms. It's a rationale that's actually comforting in the negative. Wiseman should always work in the form that suits him. Soon enough, a great nonfiction filmmaker or two might discover that the episodic form suits him or her, and in turn give all this bingeing some meaning. Like any other genre, provocation, or trendy hook, asking whodunit isn't an end but rather a beginning. Great, you've got our attention. Now show us why we're here. 📺

i *Making a Murderer* is available to watch now via Netflix

JACK FISK

Production designer Jack Fisk, who has been nominated for his second Oscar for his work on *The Revenant*, has created the unforgettable visual styles of numerous classic films from the likes of Brian De Palma, David Lynch and Paul Thomas Anderson. Here he discusses the challenges of snowbound filming, the lure of the golden hour and what he's learned from his seven-film collaboration with Terrence Malick. **Interview by Finn Halligan**

Now 69, Jack Fisk has been designing films for the last 45 years, with some breaks (he did walk away from the craft at the end of the 70s for 15 years, disillusioned). With a background in fine art, particularly sculpture, Fisk is renowned for his presentation of natural worlds. His first film as art director was *Angels as Hard as They Come* (1971) for Roger Corman. Since then he has worked on every Terrence Malick film since *Badlands* in 1973 (including *Days of Heaven*, *The Thin Red Line* and *The Tree of Life*) and collaborated closely with Brian De Palma (*Carrie*), Paul Thomas Anderson (*There Will Be Blood*, *The Master*) and David Lynch (*The Straight Story*, *Mulholland Dr.*), with whom he has been friends since high school. *The Revenant* is Fisk's first collaboration with Alejandro González Iñárritu, although it's his sixth feature designed using only natural light with his good friend Emmanuel 'Chivo' Lubezki as director of photography. He is married to the actress Sissy Spacek, whom he met on *Badlands*, and he has been nominated twice for an Oscar, for *There Will Be Blood* (2007) and *The Revenant*.

Finn Halligan: *The Revenant* must have been an all-consuming piece of work to design. What was the extent of the commitment on your part?

Jack Fisk: There were 16 months of prepping and shooting, and I was away from my farm in Virginia for a year and a half, although I first met Alejandro two years before that. I started in April 2014 with the location manager

ON JACK FISK

'Anybody can go shop for furniture, and look at enough colour photographs of the period that you can get the right wallpaper. But Jack always finds one thing that nobody else considers. I remember in *There Will Be Blood* he built the ladder into the silver mine that Daniel [Day-Lewis] has to climb down at the beginning of the movie. I finally saw, after editing the movie for a year, that Jack had so carefully dug out alternating grooves on the ladder up – in other words, this is where my foot goes, this is where my hand goes, and it wears differently on the way up and the way down. It's those kind of details that nobody else would do that instantly put you into a real space, time and place... But then the funny thing about working with Jack is, there's all this careful preparation and accuracy, and then on set he goes the other way, says: 'None of that shit matters. Just do what feels right!' It's an odd combination that makes Jack Fisk Jack Fisk.'

Paul Thomas Anderson in 'Sight & Sound' (2012)

Robin Mounsey, looking all over Canada – we started out in British Columbia, ended up in Alberta, scouring every river and lake, mountains, prairie, everything. It was like a physical fitness programme for me because we spent so much time hiking – trying to put together an image for the film. It's interesting, because locations are like doing production design with a different palette.

FH: There's a tendency to consider production design as world-creating, but you've always collaborated with nature to present your 'real' worlds.

JF: Production design is really about trying to make an overall cohesive visual for the film. And in this film, the visual is the landscape, so as production designer I needed to find the places to film, as we were going to shoot on location – but second, to find some visual representation to film that told the story and that Alejandro could stage his actors in. There were so many considerations. One major thing was lighting. The film was backlit, and one reason it took so long was that we only shot for two hours a day: the last couple of hours, the 'golden hour'. So I had to find locations that were spectacular, but were also spectacular looking south/south-west so we could get the afternoon sun backlighting the action.

We needed to find locations that worked together as a whole, but would also give you a sense of a journey for Glass [Leonardo DiCaprio's vengeance seeker in the film]





and that would indicate a period, the 1800s, before the white man had spent a lot of time out there. So I was looking for a grand scale, as it might have been back then. A lot of it was simplification – taking things out. And we had to make sure that there was a seamless vision for things, that you would look like you're in the same world, but moving. The thing we noticed early on is that if you're in one woods and you get to another woods, everything starts to look the same. Mountains, woods, rocks, they all start to look the same.

FH: So you're using nature as a partner, but you're known for big sets which are 360-degree complete environments – like the tepee village or the fort in this film.

JF: I told people on this film, "I don't want it to look like it's art directed or designed. I want it to look like it's very natural." We build things, yes, but everything was taken from nature, we copied things that really existed. We pulled out colours of nature. With the fort, for example, I wanted to see, feel the smell and the dirt. People lived very differently back then. Men were eating about ten pounds of red meat a day – that was pretty much their whole diet. They would boil it and use the water as soup after that. The forts were just filthy. They had their latrines right in the fort and when the winter came, they would never go outside. They were infested with bedbugs and lice and fleas and rats. The rats would come in because they were butchering so much meat: they created a little cesspool and an environment for these animals to breed in. They were built by the trappers and a few people they brought up there, so they were pretty rough and rugged, working with the materials they could find, so that's what we did too.

I love period films. I love doing historical research, immersing myself. I try to feel the character, the time. And then it's a question of simplifying things: I want to simplify settings rather than complicate them, because I don't want people to be thinking about them. If there's too many elements in a location or on a set, people tune out. If there's a few, people will notice them.

And generally, after 20 January, we were putting snow into all the locations, so it was almost like painting with snow....

FH: The snow – well, it has become a much discussed aspect of *The Revenant*, the toughness of the shoot, but you must have known, taking on this film, that shooting everything on location, in natural light, in continuity, was going to be a huge challenge for a production designer, no matter what happened with the weather in winter?

JF: I knew it was going to be tough. And it was certainly tougher than I thought before, but I also knew it was going to be exciting. I loved Alejandro's passion. If the director has a lust for the material it's always going to be better. When I first heard about the story, I was hesitant. It's hard to start a project, but I wanted to work with Alejandro the artist, and Chivo the artist. It's what I look for. I'd done some work on a project about [early 19th-century explorers] Lewis and Clark that was never made, and I was curious to do a film set in that period.

I've worked outside more than I've been on

a sound stage; in 45 years I've spent very little time on a sound stage. I started working on very low-budget films which had no money for sound stages so I just started building outside and it immediately felt so much better. Chivo and Alejandro wanted to shoot all natural light. This is my sixth film with Chivo, and the last six films we've done all natural light. And it requires building sets on location because you can't get natural light in a sound stage – just the scale of sound stage you would need to try to light precludes that. Chivo says, and I agree, that you can't do part of it natural and part of it artificial because the film will separate – artificial becomes stylised because you can't create a light source as big as the sun. So even in the interiors here, all the light came from candles, windows.

The reality is that snow comes and goes very quickly in Canada. The Chinook wind comes in and you lose eight inches of snow overnight. So we ended up bringing all the snow in and that

I love period films. I love doing historical research. I try to feel the character, the time. And then it's a question of simplifying things

became more difficult. We had a department for snow: they'd start as soon as it got dark and they would move snow all night, and there would be new crew on set every morning to bring snow in. A lot of the time we were just covering our own tracks. Once I realised the locations didn't exist outside Vancouver and started moving towards Alberta, we were moving away from civilisation, with some of the locations 120 miles apart; trying to get rigs and all-terrain vehicles into these places was a problem. And we never knew which day it was going to snow or rain or whether the wind was going to be unbearable. Those were the unknowns. But I still think more of the problems were with the accounting department than on the set. The film got very expensive, because we weren't shooting in parks outside Vancouver, but we'd rented production offices there. We were shooting outside of Calgary and we had to get other offices there, so all of a sudden it was like two film companies. We had people under contract in Vancouver, but we weren't working in Vancouver.

But working with Terrence, though, I learned to embrace whatever the day gives you and to make that part of your film. And because we were shooting continuity it allowed us even more freedom. We didn't have to match



Winter's bones: Fisk sought an entirely natural colour palette for *The Revenant*

to something we shot six weeks ago – we were only matching what we shot yesterday and what we'd shoot tomorrow. So it was a good way to shoot that particular film.

What Alejandro did on this film was to create an immersive world to sink into that was exciting; often the lenses were just inches from the actors' faces, it was so close. While we were waiting for the light, we finalised the camera rehearsals so we could shoot as fast as possible. We knew we only had an hour or two. I found it very exciting. And I remember talking with my crew, saying, "You should really enjoy this because we're never going to get to work on a film again that's shot in continuity, where they use perfect light. It just won't happen – nobody can afford to do that." So I certainly appreciated it as it was happening. And besides, I personally like the snow.

FH: Can you tell me about shooting in the golden hour and what it means to you as a production designer – I know you've shot backlight with Malick since *Days of Heaven* [1978].

JF: Terry quoted Whistler to me back when we did *Days of Heaven* – that the magic hour is when warehouses become palaces and your mind makes things more magnificent than you could create them. Because you're not seeing a lot of detail, you're seeing a suggestion of a thing and it allows your imagination to grow wild, to fill in.

FH: Can you describe your relationship with directors and the way you like to approach the partnership?

JF: My allegiance on a film is to the director over the producers, over anything. Because I see them as artists and I'm a collaborator and an enabler. I try to never say no to them and always give them what they want to tell the story the way they want to tell it. I get excited by the director and the material and I like doing things that are challenging and that usually pitches you into a bigger scale. It's difficult to say what will excite you. Early in my career I did the *Phantom of the Paradise* [1974] and then *Carrie* [1976] with De Palma, and *Movie Movie* [1978] with Stanley Donen, and I thought, "Oh, I'll probably be doing musicals. Or horrors." And then I went the other way: *Days of Heaven* and *There Will Be Blood* and *The Revenant* and everyone's looking at me now for this Americana experience. I still don't like being in sound stages, but for the right film I would do it. I like creating illusions and fooling people, making a world they can get immersed in. That's the exciting thing: production design, creating a world.

FH: Yet you did walk away from the profession at the end of the 70s, when Terrence Malick took a break.

JF: You know, Terry disappeared for 20 years. And I did my first union film, *Movie Movie*, and I remember thinking, "This is not fun." All they're worried about is their breaks and their lunches and there's too many union rules – it didn't seem as interesting to me. My two daughters were very young, I'd disappear off to work on a film and I'd come back and they'd grown four inches. And I just decided to work less. And I did that for 15 years, so I had an early retirement, early in my life. And now I'm back. I will work till I die I think.

FH: You loved working with him so much...

JF: I think of us as being like brothers. Terry is a philosopher and he's more cerebral and I'm more



The master builder: Fisk wanted to be able to see and feel the smell and dirt of *The Revenant*'s fort

intuitive. He trusts me. I've learned so much by just watching him work. Before I worked with him, I'd just think about the things I had to do that day, I wasn't thinking of the whole thing, how each set relates to each other. When I started thinking about film as a possible artform, then it all changed. I finally found that everything I'd seen and done in my life to that moment, I could use. I'd studied fine arts – a year at Cooper Union [in New York] and four years at Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts – and when I got out of school I was working as a sculptor. My classmate was David Lynch. We'd already been friends for a long time, and he got accepted into the American Film Institute and I went out to California with him. I didn't know what I was going to do, but I started getting work on sets, working my way up.

Terry was at the AFI and I'd heard a lot

about him. I heard he was making a film about [teenage killer] Charlie Starkweather and I thought I'd love to do that, so I started researching. Terry heard that through mutual friends and we met. I rented a van and put all my tools in there and drove to Colorado.

FH: That was *Badlands*. How was he to work with?

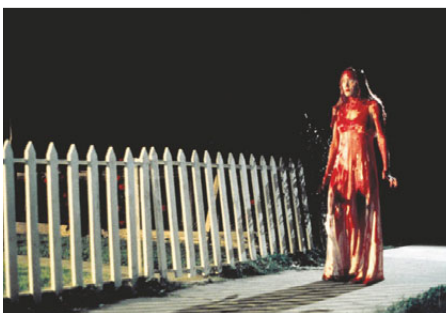
JF: Terry is unpredictable. You never knew what he was going to shoot. So I learned to give him more than he asked for. I was having a blast down there. I was on location, it was outside. I was realising that film could be an artform. I fell in love on that picture, met my wife, and the sets were even more important because they were things she was going to be using, so it was great. It was a life-changing experience for me and it made me think completely differently about films.



Little house on the prairie: much of *Days of Heaven* (1978) was shot using golden hour light



Phantom of the Paradise (1974)



Carrie (1976)



Fisk as the Man in the Planet in Eraserhead (1976)



Badlands (1973)



There Will Be Blood (2007)



The Tree of Life (2010)

I try to never say no to a director and always give them what they want to tell the story the way they want to tell it

FH: You've often said that your sets are like characters, friends.

JF: I love it when people come in and walk around my sets. Working with Sissy has been great because I always think about a character – it's not just a bedroom or a living room but the character's room. You have to get in character a bit yourself when you build the set, to understand why a place is a certain way. When I built the house in *There Will Be Blood*, where the preacher lived, I figured the family had migrated from east to west and they were building a house they remembered, but they weren't architects, they couldn't build well. I read that buildings would fall down and burn and people would just come and pick up the lumber. So I recreated it without any plans – put a stick here and a bit there and build it up, but put your spirit level away because they didn't have any back then.

One time the budget on *The Revenant* was getting so strained I thought, "Oh, I just want to finish this fort before they shut down the film. I want to see it, I want to walk through it." So my own goals are selfish in a way. I just want to experience my sets.

FH: You like taking time between your projects; does the overwhelming experience of a film like *The Revenant* increase or decrease your appetite for the challenge?

JF: I'm old enough that I don't have to work to pay the bills, but I have to work for the excitement. I want to work, but not just on any film. So I'm getting real picky. I usually choose more because of the director than anything else. Terry and I have three films in the can and he's got a bunch of other projects he wants to do, some we've been working on for ten years. If one of those gets going, yes, I'm with Terry. I'm building a house in Texas now; my two daughters live there, and so does Terry – I always wanted to build a house. You do sets and they last for six weeks, I just wanted to build something you could actually live in.

FH: And working with Alejandro?

JF: *The Revenant* was so much pressure for him; what he was trying to do was very big. Alejandro had not worked with many of the crew before, although he's a good friend of Chivo's. Me neither; they didn't want any more Americans up there than they needed. And he's tougher than directors the crew had worked for before, and the shoot was tougher, and he was approaching it like a military thing – and if people didn't measure up to what he expected, he unleashed on them. He has high standards. He's a brilliant man.

There was always a chance that everything would collapse, but that was also the kind of excitement to it. A lot of directors, I've talked with Terry about it, they like being scared. They do things that are unorthodox just to scare themselves. Terry would show up on sets he hadn't seen because he just doesn't want it so pat, so planned out, and I appreciate that, I really like that, the whole approach to art.

Film is a really exciting medium and Alejandro is an exceptional director, a great storyteller. I'd work with him again, absolutely. But who knows what he wants to do? Maybe he just wants to work in a small room with women right now. **S**

i *The Revenant* is out now in UK cinemas and was reviewed in our February issue

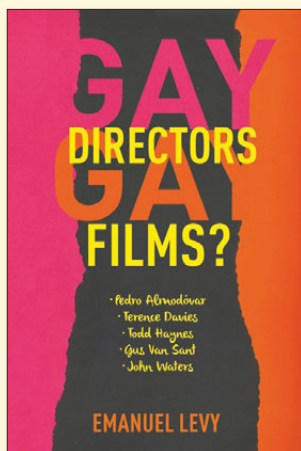
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Gay Directors, Gay Films?

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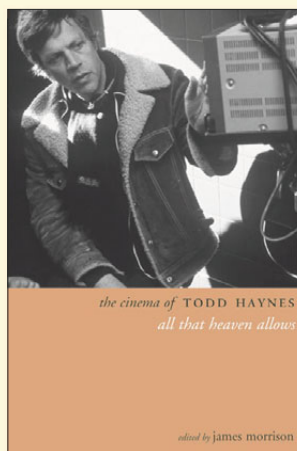
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PROFILE

TRANSCULTURAL EXPRESS

Beneath their gorgeous surfaces, the films of Gabriel Abrantes are knife-sharp, very funny satires of 21st-century privilege

By Nick Pinkerton

Privilege is the elephant in the room of contemporary cinema. While there has been much discussion in recent years of the yawning gaps in representation and opportunity between races and genders, class – a less visible marker – has attracted less comment, even in the supposedly more diverse experimental/art film world. Movie-making is like polo – anyone can learn to play in theory, but cash certainly helps your chances of winding up on the grounds.

I can only guess the class background of the young American-born, Europe-based filmmaker Gabriel Abrantes, and my guess would be that he doesn't come from dire poverty. But from the beginning of a career of frenetic productivity, Abrantes has interrogated the concept of privilege, cross-examined the privileged perspective and made it the prevailing subject of his fast-growing filmography. His bewitching movies deal in the imbalance hardwired into desire across lines of class

and culture and, as Gang of Four put it, "The problem of leisure / What to do for pleasure."

Let's begin with *Olympia I & II*, a piece of deceptively sophisticated juvenilia. This diptych, co-directed by and co-starring Katie Widloski and finished in 2006, was produced when both Abrantes and Widloski were studying at Cooper Union college in Manhattan. Over nine and a half minutes the co-directors take turns posing reclined in the buff, in the attitude of Manet's *Olympia*. In the first half, a fey off-camera voice (Abrantes) abuses his big sister (Widloski), who has apparently run away from the family home to work as a courtesan ("Olympia," he harangues, "men want to taste the exotic"). In the second, a primed and powdered Abrantes, tended to by a fawning 'mammy' in shiny greasypaint blackface (Widloski), strikes the same pose, bemoaning life in the gilded cage. "This way of life, these fine things," he whinges, "it isn't what I'd hoped for" – well before the dawn of Twitter, Abrantes has fixed his focus on #FirstWorldProblems.

Olympia I & II is quintessential exhibitionistic art school piss-taking – and evidence that Abrantes's preoccupations and aesthetic preferences were set in place early. The blanched, affectless, halting line readings would become a feature of his films, as would the poor-little-rich-boy-or-girl histrionics, the idea of inheritance

as a scourge to be avoided (in vain, always), the exoticisation of the unknowable other, and the relationship between the affluenza-stricken West and the developing world.

Olympia I & II screened at the Film Society of Lincoln Center in early February as part of a week-long programme, *Friends with Benefits*, billed as 'An Anthology of Four New American Filmmakers' – a 'career' retrospective of the just-past-30 Abrantes along with works by Daniel Schmidt, Alexander Carver and Benjamin Crotty. They constitute a loose confederation of like-minded artists, with the most visible bonding agent the promiscuous, omnipresent Abrantes, who has co-directed films with both Crotty (*Visionary Iraq*, 2008; *Liberdade*, 2011) and Schmidt (*A History of Mutual Respect*, 2010; *Palácios de Pena*, 2011). They share a devotion to analogue film – almost all the work shown was shot on super 16 – a tendency to collide high and low production values, limpid, non-professional performances and location shooting in far-flung ports of call. (The attraction to throwback tech extends to a fondness for retro synths on the soundtracks.) They also eschew conventional feature runtimes: Crotty's *Fort Buchanan* (2014), whose theatrical release is the ostensible occasion for the programme, is a slim 65 minutes, most of Abrantes's shorts a fraction of that. (This may



To the Manet born: Gabriel Abrantes, aristocrat in a gilded cage, in *Olympia I & II* (2006) – 'quintessential exhibitionistic art school piss-taking'

prompt accusations of dilettantism, but many of today's most interesting young filmmakers are throwing off the yoke of arbitrary feature length.)

Abrantes's *Olympia I & II*, *Visionary Iraq* (2009), and *Too Many Daddies, Mommies and Babies* (2009) belong to a distinct early period: taking place in stylised worlds created in studios, they were made before his ambitions, budgets or international fund-raising know-how allowed him to operate on a grander scale. The enclosed settings don't mean these films lack global ambition: in *Visionary Iraq*, Abrantes and Crotty (classmates at the Le Fresnoy art school in Tourcoing, France), the lone performers, take on multiple roles, including a brother and adopted Angolan sister who are introduced enjoying a last night of incest before their deployment to Iraq. *Too Many Daddies, Mommies and Babies* concerns a gay couple who doom the planet when they give up their global warming research to start a family, siring a baby with a poor Portuguese surrogate mother who dies in labour, unmourned and unknown.

The theme of the poor being used as breeding stock for their social betters also appears in *A History of Mutual Respect*, a pivotal work which furnished the name for Abrantes's production company, Mutual Respect; gave him his first high-profile festival win, at Locarno; and established the template for his work to date: opulent, deadpan, globe-trotting, culture-clash sicko comedy. Abrantes and Schmidt play vacationing first-worlders in Brasilia, about to plunge into the Amazon basin on a mission to taste the exotic – as Schmidt's character, Cookie, puts it: "I just want to sleep with a native woman without getting some ungodly disease." He seemingly fulfils his search for self-oblivion through "clean, true pussy" and "simple, direct, and unmolested" love, and decides to remain happily ever after in the jungle, only to discover via text message that his "bro" has transported the dusky girl to a manorial home in Portugal where she will carry future bearers of the family name.

'Mutual respect', for Abrantes, is inextricable from mutual incomprehension, and transcultural confusion is the common element to the startlingly eclectic films that follow. *Liberdade*, a story of star-crossed lovers, begins in *medias res*, as an Angolan boy (Wilson Teixeira) holds up a neighbourhood pharmacy for its Viagra supply. Pursued by the police, he is cornered on the rooftop of a shabby apartment building in Luanda, caressing the hair of his Chinese girlfriend (Betty Meixue). As the sun drops above the Atlantic and police helicopters circle, the soundtrack is overwhelmed by the beginning of 'Diamonds on the Soles of Her Shoes' from Paul Simon's *Graceland* album, whose history as a 'problematic' work of cultural appropriation is no coincidence. From here we flash back to an abridged history of their affair, tender, wistful – and unconsummated, because the poor boy from the slums can't get it up for his rich girl. The film concludes with heartbreaking images of youths swimming in an offshore graveyard for retired freighters – while working with a variety of DPs, Abrantes has retained a uniformly ravishing visual style. In *Fratelli* (2011), a pastoral Renaissance period piece co-directed with Alexandre Melo, a mincing aristocrat and his

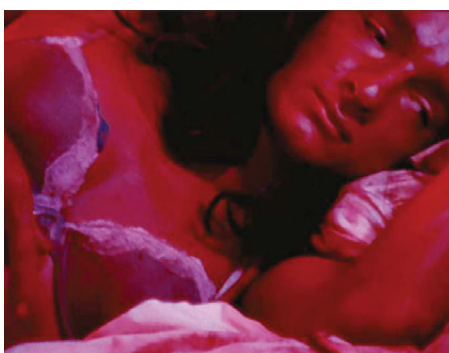


Edith Scob in *Ennui Ennui* (2013)

gym-buff, bulging-codpiece retainers come across a peasant unconscious from drink in a meadow; the aristocrat proposes a plan to convince the boy on waking that he is a nobleman emerging from a coma, parading before him sexual opportunities and art treasures, including Titian's *Venus of Urbino*, a precursor of *Olympia*.

Abrantes is reportedly at work on two feature-length works: *The Hunchback*, a collaboration with Ben Rivers, and another film with Schmidt; but the 58-minute *Palácios de Pena* (2011) is his longest work to date. Highlighted by an ecstatic, voluptuous nightclub outing and a comedown car-ride set to a chopped-and-screwed version of Alphaville's 'Forever Young', the film follows a struggle between two adolescent female cousins vying to inherit their grandmother's fortune. Abrantes's own grandmother, Alcina, who also appears as the matriarch in *A History of Mutual Respect*, plays that role – a little self-indicting personal touch, perhaps. In the Haiti-shot *Ornithes* (2012) Abrantes is explicitly the target of his own satire. The film revolves around a production of Aristophanes's comedy in the coastal city of Jacmel, performed by a rara carnival troupe and directed by 'Little Gabriel Abrantes', according to the bullhorn ballyhoo of the pick-up truck we see canvassing the countryside. Abrantes favours nesting structures: here Aristophanes's story of men seeking to infiltrate the company of birds is framed by the story of an interloping artist awkwardly trying to ingratiate himself to a foreign environment; the local girls care

Taken together, a portrait emerges from Abrantes's films of a glutton for beauty with a knotty moral and political vision

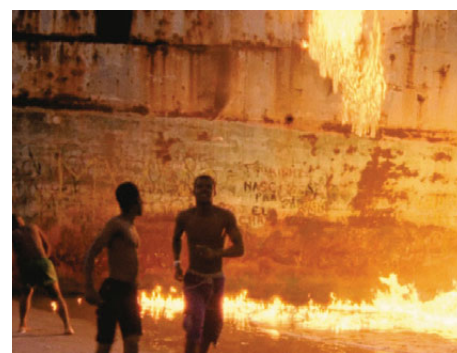


Visionary Iraq (2008)

only for *Twilight* movies, while his Haitian star grumbles about his director's "shitty theory": "[He] thinks we can still have a Dionysian collective trance induced by polyphonic hexameters..."

Abrantes has sole director credit on *Birds*, as on the recent *Ennui Ennui* (2013) and *Taprobana* (2014), two films that with their polished CG work and lush, alien landscapes feel like pocket-sized transgressive blockbusters. *Ennui Ennui*, like *Visionary Iraq*, imagines contemporary geopolitics as a network of smothering parent-child relationships – a husky Afghan teenager's tiger mother pressures him to kidnap and rape a princess (Esther Garrel) living alone with her over-familiar father, though he accidentally nabs a French Libraries Without Borders volunteer away from her *haute-couture*-clad diplomat mother (Edith Scob); all this is observed by a military drone named Hellfire Destroyer #503027, reporting to her "Daddy", Barack Obama. While this film deals in very contemporary East-West transactions, *Taprobana* looks back to an earlier colonial era, depicting episodes from the life and afterlife of the 16th-century Portuguese poet Luís Vaz de Camões, author of the epic *Os Lusíadas*. Abrantes gives us Philip II as a lisping queen of a piece with *Fratelli*'s aristocrat, and de Camões, the national hero, as a cranky hop-head who practises coprophagy with his Chinese lover Dinamene (Jani Zhao), abandons her drowned corpse to chase darting nymphs, and finally finds himself barred from Poet's Heaven. (De Camões is played by Natxo Checa, credited as producer and cameraman on a number of Abrantes's films, and a quietly essential partner in his creative endeavour.)

Abrantes has developed a unique combination of schoolyard low comedy and highbrow sources – *The Taming of the Shrew* in *Fratelli*, Aristophanes in *Birds*, de Camões here. His films revel in collisions, in class clashes, cultural confusion and polyglot babble, with dialogue in Brazilian and Iberian Portuguese, English, Attic Greek, Haitian Creole, Spanish, French, Chinese, Sinhalese, and probably a few others. Any one of his movies might be written off as the work of a know-somethingish smart-ass aesthete, but taken together a portrait emerges of a glutton for beauty with a knotty moral and political vision. We pretend to admire art that puts sacred cows to the knife, though the unspoken rule is that the sacred cows in question shouldn't be those worshipped by anyone in the inscribed audience. And while there's no telling what Gabriel Abrantes do next, he most definitely has his knives out. 



Liberdade (2011)

EXCLUSION ZONE

Gangsta rap ought to make for great cinema – if only Hollywood could handle its contradictions and social realism

By Daniel Barrow

Late in *Straight Outta Compton* (2015), F. Gary Gray's panorama of NWA's low life and high times, Dr. Dre (Corey Hawkins) fools around on the keyboard with one hand, a 40 of malt liquor in the other. Fumbling through variations, his fingers settle on the pitch-bent melody that would later form the spine of his 1992 single 'Nuthin' but a 'G' Thang'. When, one scene later, the action returns to the same setting, the camera moves out through the french doors, craning over a pool party crammed with flesh. Once genius finds its form, the linkage tells us, the rest is history. The film abounds with such schematic eureka moments. Indeed, as deployed here they're inadvertently appropriate to the subject: the film's vision of struggle and reward, of street realpolitik and African-American male hedonism, borrows less from the conventional rock biopic than from the rap video form pioneered by Ric Menello, Hype Williams and other, lesser auteurs of booty shorts, Cristal and lowriders.

These overplayed conventions are less interesting in themselves than as symptoms of struggles and ideological contradictions in the history of hip-hop. The genesis of 'G' Thang' comes at the moment in NWA's career when, with Ice Cube (O'Shea Jackson Jr in the film) gone, the dialectic between social realism and the harsh sensuality of Dre's production, which made gangsta rap so vivid as it emerged at the end of the 1980s, collapsed, dissolving into the bliss of the slow jam. You can have street knowledge or get funky but not both, apparently. Gangsta attempted to convey the injustices and richness of African-American life in the stress between these elements and so, contrary to its own nihilistic attitudes and poses, create some small measure of freedom for young black men. Its onscreen double would have a much more ambivalent trajectory, at times favouring one component or the other.

The great early hip-hop films – *Wild Style* (1982), *Beat Street* (1984) or *Krush Groove* (1985) – resembled elongated music videos (also an emergent form). Raw, protean and playful, usually starring musicians and non-actors, they capitalised on hip-hop's odd commercial position. Internationally successful but still hermetic, tied to slang, ritual and local knowledge, it was tough to turn into the apparently universal narratives the movie industry required.

Gangsta changed that. NWA and contemporaries such as Boogie Down Productions and Ice T (now better known for *Law & Order: SVU* than '6 'N the Morning') were praised for their 'storytelling' skills, the way they dramatised street life. The immersiveness and narrative finesse of later albums such as Nas's *Illmatic*, Notorious B.I.G.'s *Ready to Die* and Mobb Deep's *The Infamous* led to them being characterised as 'cinematic'. And gangsta's subject matter was irresistible. For all its racial prudery, Hollywood knew how to sell stories



'So where's our Oscar nomination?' NWA as portrayed in F. Gary Gray's *Straight Outta Compton*

about scary black men with Glocks. Better yet if they secretly had hearts of gold and could show it by making life choices of a sort that, in reality, Reaganomics and the drugs war denied them. Hence the brief wave of films that followed *Boyz n The Hood* (1991), *Juice* (1991), *Menace II Society* (1993), *South Central* (1992), *Poetic Justice* (1993) and, to a lesser extent, Spike Lee's adaptation of Richard Price's *Clockers* (1995) were the obverse of rap videos' luscious celebration of thug life. On *Juice* – directed by Ernest Dickerson, cinematographer on *Krush Groove* and Lee's

Spike Lee has a tin-eared hostility to any but the most 'conscious' rap – but especially gangsta rap

films up to *Malcolm X* (1992) – the soundtrack, by The Bomb Squad and the likes of Rakim, Big Daddy Kane, Too \$hort and EPMD, is layered in obtrusive slabs over the action, as if sonic pleasure and social reality exist in different universes.



Give pizza chance: *Do the Right Thing* (1989), directed by Spike Lee, pictured right as Mookie

Such crudities erased the historic weight of black experience as surely as did *Driving Miss Daisy* (1989). On Public Enemy's 'Burn Hollywood Burn', Ice Cube aired another option – "Let's make our own movies like Spike Lee". But Lee's own relationship with hip-hop was not straightforward; in his early films, hip-hop is everywhere and nowhere.

In *Do the Right Thing* (1989) the studiously anarchic haircuts, primary-colour shorts and Air Jordans, the Zulu Nation rhetoric of Ahmad (Steve White) and Buggin' Out (Giancarlo Esposito), belong squarely in the 'Daisy Age', the brief late 80s efflorescence of psychedelic rap. The extremely strange tone of *Do the Right Thing's* first half, which rides on the energy and specificity of a certain colloquial humour but is conveyed through overtly theatrical performances, recalls the feel – goofy and alienated, with ideas self-consciously above its station – of De La Soul's album *3 Feet High and Rising*, released the same summer. Everyone remembers Public Enemy's 'Fight the Power' racketing out over the opening credits, but not Bill Lee's tasteful jazz score. Rosie Perez's opening-credit dance sequence is a fantastical portrait of (black) power and autonomy, interpolating a vaudeville shuffle into lithe shadowboxing – an irresistible translation of hip-hop, as call for black revolt, into style.

But 'Fight the Power' is the only hip-hop track proper in Lee's early work and one of the least soulful tracks from this period of Public Enemy's career, putting 70s James Brown through an industrial shredder. It is telling that Lee emphasises its unambiguous message – that towards the end of the film the fractal complexity of the song's sound has to be processed, after Raheem's death at the hands of the police, into a literal image of (race) riot. (*Compton* repeats this move, segueing from a vocal performance's ambiguous anger to footage of the beating of Rodney King.) That Lee has a tin-eared hostility to any but the most 'conscious' rap – but especially gangsta rap – became obvious later: in *Bamboozled* (2000), which allegorised gangsta's vocabulary of pimp stereotypes as blackface minstrelsy; and in *Chi-Raq* (2015), a drama of southside Chicago gang wars that ignores the area's actual avant-garde street culture in favour of the anodyne likes of John Legend.

Hip-hop – or rather, the subset of hip-hop that Lee thinks is valid or 'real' – stands, in *Do the Right Thing*, for community empowerment, a reality to set against the 'reality' of gangsta. Or, rather, the fantasy of a coherent political rage against the limits of black life that Lee, as a filmmaker, can't make vivid himself. It's as if, in order to imagine any scrap of freedom for the Bed-Stuy characters he clearly loves, he has to turn the most innovative part of their own culture into something alien, to be imposed from outside. He insists on hip-hop's scorched-earth militancy, on its break with the sonic pleasures of black music's history up to then. And by doing so – by substituting a sonically narrow idea of 'genuine' hip-hop for the category itself – Lee strips away the communal life, the beauty and terror that the music confronted when it first emerged. In its own way, it's no better than *Compton's* nostalgia for gangsta's inverted image of the good life. 📍

PRIMAL SCREEN THE WORLD OF SILENT CINEMA

If festivals and DVD reissues are any measure, silent film is becoming ever more popular. But can it pay its way?



By Neil Brand

I'll start with a caveat: this piece is about a big question I don't know the answer to – nor, I suspect, does anybody else. But that's why it's worth opening up the debate. As a silent film musician I worry about the future of the live artform I love, even though more people are experiencing it than ever before.

The question is: is 'live' silent film capable of attracting big enough audiences to be a commercially stable form of cinema exhibition?

From the coming of sound until the 1980s it was up to cinematheques, arthouse cinemas (particularly the BFI Regional Film Theatres, as they then were) and film societies to provide what silent cinema experience there was, and those interested in the genre knew where to seek the experience out. But in the 30 years I have been playing silent cinema I have seen the artform move from attracting specialist audiences to a much more mainstream presence, helped hugely by being championed by high-profile figures such as Martin Scorsese and Paul Merton and a new young generation of cinephile film-makers. New festivals have sprung up – such as Hippfest in Bo'ness and Slapstick in Bristol – and audiences have grown for performances in non-traditional spaces such as open-air and music venues. Each month brings 'new' material – ie, restored and rescued from what seemed like terminal obscurity – to DVD and Blu-ray, and most film fans probably have at least one silent film among their DVDs, even if it's only Michel Hazanavicius's *The Artist* (2011). Silent cinema is more visible in our culture than it has ever been before. But, ironically, the commercial viability of 'live cinema' seems to be becoming ever more problematic.

I put my question to Stuart Brown, head of BFI Programming and Acquisitions. He responded: "If you mean 'Is silent film a viable business proposition?' then I would have to say no. I'd love to think otherwise, but I don't think there is money to be made from silent film exhibition..." Which is not to say that there is not money around to support screenings: "I do think that with the establishment of the BFI Lottery Funds for audiences and the Film Audience Network, there is more opportunity to apply for funding these days to support the exhibition of silent film."

Brown's aim at BFI Southbank for many years has been to cultivate new audiences for silent film – particularly but not exclusively BFI National Archive restorations – by, for example, presenting screenings with a diverse approach to the accompaniments. According to Brown, "Most of these shows sell out and we do reach new audiences, but they are all very heavily

The times are gone when a silent film with live music was 'unusual' or 'special'



Piano man: Neil Brand

subsidised. As are the annual (London Film Festival) archive galas we present, which tend to be on a larger scale and pitched more directly to the existing community of silent film lovers. However, if I'm honest about the numbers, I have to say that they are relatively slight – certainly, in commercial terms, nothing to get excited about."

In mainland Europe, the picture is similar. According to Stefan Droessler of Munich Filmmuseum, part of the problem is that silent film is too successful: "In my opinion the attraction of silent films in cinemas screening is diminishing, because people are more and more used to it." These days, people can watch high-quality versions of films with recorded scores (sometimes a variety of recorded scores) at home, on DVD and Blu-ray; and the best-known titles are shown everywhere, not exclusively in archival cinemas. "In our Filmmuseum," Droessler says, "the times are gone when just a silent film with live music could attract a larger audience as something 'unusual' or 'special'."

In the US, Jon Vickers of Indiana University Cinema has a more optimistic take: "Our silent film screenings with recorded scores almost always recover costs. We programme our silent films as 'one-offs', the same way that we programme most of our repertory screenings in the calendar. If we are screening a silent film with a recorded/synched score, it will be as commercially viable as a similarly known sound title." But the 'authentic' live experience is still pricey: "Whenever we have live accompaniment (solo, ensemble, or orchestra), we seek a partner or sponsor to subsidise the artists' costs."

These thoughts throw up further questions – if Stuart Brown's 'new audiences' agenda is the key to making live silent cinema more commercially viable, are traditional arthouse cinemas at a disadvantage? Are theatres, concert halls and club venues more likely to find an audience for live silents? Is Jon Vickers's experience of soundtracked silents the future for silent cinema exhibition? Crucially, do traditional silent film screenings deserve financial support, or is that just special pleading? Can live silent cinema ever be anything more than an expensive luxury? 📍

THE MAP AND THE TERRITORY

If you regard every film as a kind of map, and are less interested in the stars than in the streets where they are shot, you may be a cine-tourist

By Roland-François Lack

The Cine-Tourist website began in 2011 as a place to post the 400 or so maps in films that I had collected as frame grabs in the preceding three or four years. They accumulated as The Daily Map, one a day for a year. I add to the collection more sporadically now: the current total is 600. Spotting maps in films leads to questions about what they are doing there, and on to broader questions about the relation between mapping and filmmaking. These are questions that have engaged film scholars for some time now – for example, Tom Conley in the US, Sébastien Caquard in Canada and Teresa Castro in France. Mapping is also, of course, a feature of research into filmgoing, as in the work of my UCL colleague Chris O'Rourke (whose beautiful website London's Silent Cinemas was showcased in 'Primal Screen' in *Sight & Sound* last month).

Films and maps have a great deal in common. It isn't unreasonable to say that a film is like a map, especially if, like me, you are less interested in the people on screen than in the places behind them (I get particularly irritated when I can't see some aspect of the place on screen because there's an actor standing in front of it). Like a map, a film is a selective representation. Like a map, a film reconfigures the place it represents so that the user can find their way to or through that place. Like a map, a film can be an object of interest in itself. Of course, the ways in which films are not like maps are also interesting and illuminating.

The Cine-Tourist has become a repository of my place-related research into films, most of which is a simple matter of identifying locations. There are many websites and blogs that do this kind of thing (my favourite by far is Reel Streets – www.reelstreets.com). The Cine-Tourist is more



Wetherill Road, Muswell Hill, as seen in R.W. Paul's *The Unfortunate Policeman* (1905)

personal than most in that I only write about places I know: London, Paris and Geneva. In large part this is the kind of research that finds its way into the footnotes of more ambitious film scholarship. If I have foregrounded the footnotes it is to make the point that, in thinking about films, sometimes minor information has major significance. It is not insignificant that, for example, in his famous run towards death at the end of Godard's *A bout de souffle*, Michel Poiccard, the Belmondo character, is running down the rue Campagne Première towards the cemetery of Montparnasse. If you know Paris well you may immediately have this information; otherwise it comes from watching the film with map in hand.

Maps are an essential tool for place-related film study, and I am surrounded by them as I write. They are also essential for those who would leave their homes and visit the places they have seen on screen. Cine-tourism is a

Cinema is, to paraphrase Godard, a slave to memory. It cannot help but be a record of things that are no longer there

burgeoning industry, and visitors to my website may be confused that they can't actually book tours to Swinging London or New Wave Paris. My cine-tourist is a fictional character, someone who walks down a street remembered from the movies, sees herself in a place once occupied by someone there on the screen and is then struck with melancholy that the place is not what it was, and that the stars have departed.

Cinema is, to paraphrase Godard, a slave to memory. It cannot help but be a record of things that are no longer there. The cinema is the best record of a city's changing forms. For the cine-tourist, the places are as important as the films, and the website is as much about cinema's relation to the local, its place in local history. Here again the interest is personal. My local filmmaker is R.W. Paul, who made films in the Muswell Hill area between 1898 and 1910, and is still Muswell Hill's only real claim to cinematic fame (despite what the internet thinks, none of *Shaun of the Dead* was actually filmed here). Paul's films are not a detailed or comprehensive record of the place, and the local historian may not glean much information from them, but their existence is a mark of distinction for the streets on which they were shot. And that is true for any street on to which the cinema has ventured. For the cine-tourist there are just two kinds of place: those that have been filmed and those that haven't. Ideally I would have maps of Paris, London and Geneva on which the streets were marked according to that distinction. With them we could all happily avoid the un-cinematic streets of those cities. I've started work on the Paris map, but it might take me some time. ☹



Roland-François Lack's maps and photos can be seen at www.thecinetourist.net



Point taken: René Clair's aviation drama *The Prey of the Wind* (*La Proie du vent*, 1926)

TRUE DÉTECTIVE

Through interviews, following clues and painstaking work in the archives, a lost Godard film has been restored to life

By Michael Witt

In 1978 Jean-Luc Godard delivered a series of talks on cinema history in Montreal, the recordings of which have recently been retranscribed and published for the first time in English as *Introduction to a True History of Cinema and Television*. Two years later he embarked on a second series of talks in association with the Rotterdamse Kunststichting (Rotterdam Arts Foundation) about which far less is known. Researching the genesis of his video project *Histoire(s) du cinéma* for a book on Godard as a cinema historian a few years ago, I was particularly intrigued by references to him showing a compilation film as part of these talks during the 1981 Rotterdam Film Festival. I therefore interviewed a number of people who had been involved in the venture, including Monica Galer (at that time, Tegelaar), who was part of the Rotterdam festival team from its inception in 1972. By 1980 she had come to occupy a key role within it alongside festival director Huub Bals, and was instrumental in convincing the Foundation to invest in the collaboration with Godard in the first place. I also unearthed a tantalising description of the compilation film by *Cahiers* critic Charles Tesson, who had been at the screening.

Godard's contract with the Foundation was for 11 two-day talks. His method – as in Montreal – was to juxtapose reels from different films around a given theme, to explore connections and resonances between them. But his heart does not seem to have been in the project, and in the end he only gave four talks, which were poorly received. Nevertheless, it gave rise to one of his most unusual and daring montage experiments: at the same festival his latest film *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* was being screened six times; Godard prepared a 'special edition' with the title *Sauve la vie (qui peut)*, which he showed just once. *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, Godard's much heralded return to art cinema following his exploration of video and television with Anne-Marie Miéville in the 1970s, makes stunning use of altered motion in its dissection of human relations under consumer capitalism. To make the new film he set aside parts of a print of *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, and inserted into the five remaining sections extracts from four films in the Rotterdam collection: *The Old and the New* (Sergei M. Eisenstein and Grigori V. Aleksandrov, 1929), *Cops* (Eddie Cline and Buster Keaton, 1922), *La Terra Trema* (Luchino Visconti, 1948) and *Man of Marble* (Andrzej Wajda, 1976). *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* provides the compilation film's structuring armature: the archival material is always preceded and followed by a sequence from *Sauve qui peut (la vie)*, whose narrative unfolds in its original order, albeit now repeatedly interrupted by the inserts.

I visited the Amsterdam EYE Filmmuseum archive in 2013, where the Rotterdam collection is preserved, and viewed prints of all these films. This confirmed a number of suspicions: the two



Images from the reconstructed version of Godard's *Sauve la vie (qui peut)*

Godard likened viewing the film to watching television as someone switches the channel every ten minutes

silent films have no musical accompaniment, and the sound films all have Dutch subtitles. There were also some surprises: some of the prints were 16mm, others 35mm, and the print of *Cops*, which came from Monopol Apolofilm in Prague, has Czech intertitles subtitled in Dutch. By cross-referencing Charles Tesson's written description with the start and end points of the reels, I was able to map out the film's structure and assemble a digital reconstruction of it. I presented this in the context of a series of screenings organised by Vinzenz Hediger at the Deutsches Filmmuseum in Frankfurt in 2013; I hope to recreate it in a theatrical context using the EYE archive prints.

It is an extraordinary experiment, which provides fresh insight into Godard's working methods, and in particular into his use of montage as a generative tool for thinking and provoking thought. Viewing it is a disconcerting experience, which Godard likened at the time

to watching television as someone switches the channel every ten minutes. The nine sequences are long enough to allow the viewer to relax into them, until a sudden lurch – out of *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* into one of the archival inserts or vice versa – delivers a sharp sensory jolt and a reminder of its fragmentary structure. The first such transition transplants us from a discussion between Denise (Nathalie Baye) and her old acquaintance Michel (Michel Cassagne) about a potential job – all in colour and with sound – to the silent black-and-white intensity of the dusty religious procession and prayer for rain in *The Old and the New*.

Thematically, the compilation film offers a fascinating riff on Godard's exploration in *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* of economic servitude and the damaging effects of the divorce in capitalist societies between love and work. In the context of his evolving project, it combines a startling retrospective dissection of the original film with an anticipatory glimpse – especially via the material from *Man of Marble* – of some of the themes of his next feature, *Passion* (and indeed of the lead actor, Jerzy Radziwiłowicz). Last but not least, it reveals a hitherto missing stage between his experimentation with film reels in Montreal and Rotterdam and his later videographic film history practice, with which we are now much more familiar via *Histoire(s) du cinéma* and related works.

Godard's development of *Histoire(s)* during the 1980s was significantly helped by the telecine equipment he bought with funds from the Rotterdam Arts Foundation, which enabled him to transfer clips to video and combine and manipulate them electronically. He did not forget his debt to the Foundation, and to Monica Tegelaar in particular: he thanked the former in each of the *Histoire(s)* books and co-dedicated the opening chapter of the series to Tegelaar. ©

i Michael Witt will introduce his digital reconstruction of *Sauve la vie (qui peut)* at BFI Southbank, London, on February 24



The Amsterdam EYE Filmmuseum archive



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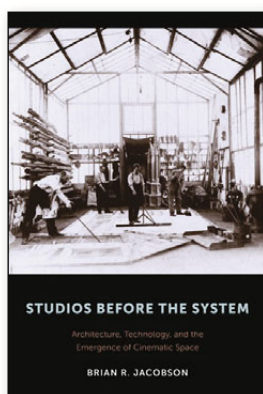
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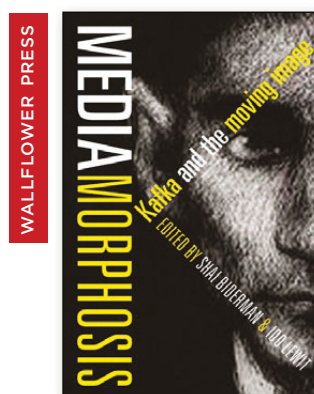
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Reviews



80 **King Jack**

Charlie Plummer's affecting central performance as Jack skilfully layers in the ache of morning-to-night anxiety behind the see-through facade of self-possession



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Two rode together: Richard Jenkins as Chicory and Kurt Russell as Hunt

Bone Tomahawk

USA/United Kingdom/France 2015

Director: S. Craig Zahler

Certificate 18 132m 18s

Reviewed by Anton Bitel

"Riders comin' in one way, savages the other," says Buddy (Sid Haig) to his bushwhacking partner Purvis (David Arquette), describing, in the opening sequence of *Bone Tomahawk*, the no man's land they have entered between civilisation and the Stone Age, and also setting forth the tension that will come to dominate the film. Figuring themselves beyond the reach of morality or the law, these two ruffians have just cut the throats of some sleeping cowboys out in the wilderness, but as they search through their victims' Bibles for any valuables, one camper, not quite dead, manages to let off a gunshot, and the report attracts a group of passing horsemen (signified by the noise of hooves and the dust cloud of their approach). Fearing justice or a less formal reprisal, Purvis and Buddy flee to rockier terrain, where they stumble, transgressively, into a burial ground. There, Buddy is summarily arrowed and

axed by a shadowy figure, while Purvis retreats, in his haste upsetting a stone from a cairn.

This prologue to S. Craig Zahler's directorial debut sets out the thematic lines from which the subsequent story will divide or deviate. Like many an oater before it, *Bone Tomahawk* explores western history and identity across the fluid boundaries between criminality and the law, savagery and progress, sacrilege and faith. There is no question that, in comparison with the dark place from which Purvis has just escaped, the small and significantly named town of Bright Hope where he ends up 11 days later is, as local sheriff Franklin Hunt (Kurt Russell) says, "civilised" – but here civilisation is relative. The welcome that Purvis, though unarmed, receives in Bright Hope is to be shot in the leg by Hunt (a habitual leg shooter) and jailed – the non-fatal injury only so that Purvis can live long enough to be hanged (in this respect, Hunt resembles the character recently played by Russell in Quentin Tarantino's *The Hateful Eight*). Justice, Bright Hope-style, is still rather rough around the edges – and what's more, Purvis has unknowingly brought a bit of savagery along with him into town, in the form of a vengeful raiding party.

After murdering a black stable hand, this gang of natives steals a string of horses and abducts from the jailhouse not just Purvis but also the sheriff's deputy Nick (Evan Jonigkeit) and the doctor's assistant Samantha O'Dwyer (Lili Simmons).

As Hunt leads a rescue party comprising anecdotal-afflicted 'back-up deputy' Chicory (Richard Jenkins), Samantha's recently lamed cowboy husband Arthur (Patrick Wilson) and experienced trekker John Brooder (Matthew Fox), *Bone Tomahawk* appears to be following a



A man alone: Patrick Wilson as Arthur

trail already blazed by John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956). Certainly the Indian-hating bigotry of John Wayne's Ethan Edwards is preserved in the character of the trigger-happy Brooder: having witnessed as a ten-year-old the murder of his mother and sister by natives, he has been indiscriminately killing them – women and children included – ever since. His xenophobia extends beyond the native population: when a pair of strangers, armed only with crucifixes, approach the camp at night, Brooder doesn't hesitate to gun them down in cold blood. "Mr Brooder just educated two Mexicans on the meaning of Manifest Destiny," observes Chicory, wryly framing his companion's actions in the ideological terms of American expansionism. Brooder insists that the two strangers were "scouts for a raiding party" – and the next night the camp is indeed infiltrated by thieving bushwhackers – but the question remains whether Brooder has crossed yet another of the film's moral lines (as Chicory expressly believes) and in so doing stymied the posse's progress.

Brooder's racist perspective is not, of course, the film's, and it is offset by 'The Professor' (Zahn McClarnon), a dapper Native American resident of Bright Hope who is presented as a fount of local knowledge in a desert of colonial ignorance. Introducing terms that even the town mayor can't spell, such as 'troglodyte', the Professor is quick to distinguish Hunt and co's quarry – designated a "spoilt bloodline of inbred animals that rape and eat their own mothers" – as "something else entirely" from the Indians of his own kind. The savage Other in *Bone Tomahawk* is no ordinary native but a mythic monster that can be safely demonised by the filmmakers without fear of offending any real tribe's sensibilities. These body-modifying, anthropophagous troglodytes are a convenient repository of straightforwardly bestial atavism against which all the other characters' more or less human qualities can be measured.

"This is why frontier life is so difficult. Not because of the Indians or the elements, but because of the idiots. You're idiots!" This line, addressed late in the film by an indignant Samantha to her male would-be rescuers, highlights the absurdity of riders deprived of their horses and depending for their salvation on a man so crippled that he cannot walk. Branded upon *Bone Tomahawk*'s oater tropes is cluster-bungling of a decidedly Coen-esque stamp, as men's quirks and foibles, as well as the more mundane aspects of life on the trail, are milked for sly comedy. The effect is greatly assisted by the verbal wit of Zahler's screenplay, with one mannered zinger following fast on another (Zahler also co-wrote the score, with Jeff Herriott). Yet as with his 2013 novel *Wriths of the Broken Land*, Zahler is making extraterritorial incursions into genres of yet another kind. There is a hint of this in the opening scene, with the casting of horror veterans Haig (*Spider Baby*, *House of 1000 Corpses*) and Arquette (the *Scream* series) in the roles of the outlaw cutthroats. And by the time Hunt's posse has brought things full circle, entering the heart of darkness in the place where the film began, there will be blood, brutality and gore of a kind that would make Sam Peckinpah or even Giulio Questi blush, no matter how much the good-natured humour jarringly abides to maximise its own – and the horror's – edgy impact.

Bone Tomahawk belongs to the mixed mode known as 'weird west'. In much the same way



The ruthless four: Kurt Russell, Patrick Wilson, Richard Jenkins and Matthew Fox

that Alex Turner's *Dead Birds* (2004), Grant Harvey's *Ginger Snaps Back* (2004), J.T. Petty's *The Burrowers* (2008) and John Geddes's *Exit Humanity* (2011) respectively – and retrospectively – relocate cinema's ghosts, werewolves, monsters and zombies in America's pre-cinematic history, or that *The Hateful Eight* might be regarded as a postmodern (p)refiguring of John Carpenter's *The Thing* (1982), Zahler's film too, when viewed in terms of strict historical chronology, anticipates and cannibalises the violent culture clash of

This is why frontier life is so difficult. Not because of the Indians or the elements, but because of the idiots. You're idiots!'

Wes Craven's *The Hills Have Eyes* (1977), set over a century later. Here horror takes pioneering form in oater territories, western revisionism looks forward to genres new, and the outrages and atrocities of the 20th century and beyond can have their origins traced back to the very foundations of the Old West. This free passage between past and present is what lends the film its epic status, no less than the wide-open vistas.

When, in the end, one of Hunt's rescue party restores to safer ground a white stone that he had raised as the only weapon left to him in cannibal country, he is not just marking a re-emergence from nightmarish barbarity to striving humanity, but also rewriting the frontier, both between Bright Hope and the troglodytes' 'Valley of Starving Men', and between one genre and another – in a funny (strange and haha) western landscape where it is all too easy to get pillaged, consumed or lost. 📌

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Dallas Sonnier
Jack Heller

Written by

S. Craig Zahler

Director of Photography

Benji Bakshi

Film Editors

Fred Raskin
Greg D'Auria

Production Designer

Frederick Waff

Music

Jeff Herriott

S. Craig Zahler

Sound Mixer

Brian Hackett

Costume Designer

Chantal Filson

Production Companies

Caliber Media

presents in

association with The

Fyzz Facility, The Joker

Films, Realbuilder

Productions a Dallas

Sonnier & Jack

Heller production

A film by S.

Craig Zahler

Executive Producers

Wayne Marc Godfrey

Robert James

David Gilbery

Jon D. Wagner

R. Scott Fort

Hengameh Panahi

Peter Sherayko

Cast

Kurt Russell

Sheriff Franklin Hunt

Patrick Wilson

Arthur

Matthew Fox

John Brooder

Lili Simmons

Samantha

Richard Jenkins

Chicory

Evan Jonigkeit

Deputy Nick

David Arquette

Purvis

Kathryn Morris

Lorna Hunt

Sid Haig

Buddy

Geno Segers

Boar Tusks

Sean Young

Mrs Porter

Fred Melamed

Clarence

Zahn McClarnon

The Professor

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

The Works UK

Distribution Ltd

America's frontierlands, after the Civil War. Having murdered some camping cowboys, bushwhackers Buddy and Purvis stumble into a burial ground, where Buddy is killed. Purvis flees to the town of Bright Hope, where he is wounded and jailed by Hunt, the sheriff. That night, a man is gutted, and Purvis, deputy sheriff Nick and doctor's assistant Samantha are abducted. 'The Professor', a Native American, recognises an arrow belonging to a nameless tribe of savage troglodytes from the 'Valley of Starving Men'. Hunt forms a rescue party with Samantha's husband Arthur (whose leg has been injured in an accident), experienced trailsman Brooder and aged 'back-up deputy' Chicory.

Two Christian Mexicans approach the camp and are shot dead by Brooder, who claims they were scouts for

a bushwhacking gang. The next night, bushwhackers steal the posse's horses. As they travel on foot, Arthur falls further behind, his injury worsening. The three other men enter the troglodytes' valley; they are attacked and Brooder is killed. Hunt and Chicory are imprisoned in a cave with Samantha and Nick. The troglodytes butcher Nick for food. The prisoners trick three troglodytes into drinking opium. A troglodyte vengefully pulls Hunt from his cell and injures him severely, but Hunt uses his attacker's bone tomahawk against him. Meanwhile Arthur, who has crawled his way painfully into the valley, extracts a bone whistle from the throat of a troglodyte assailant he has killed, and uses it to lure out others and shoot them. Arthur rescues Samantha and Chicory. Hunt, dying, stays behind to kill the remaining troglodytes.

Chronic

Mexico/France 2015

Director: Michel Franco

Certificate 15 93m 25s

Reviewed by Thirza Wakefield

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist

Chronic is the kind of film that leaves the viewer with a multitude of questions – among them, why was it made? Mexican director Michel Franco's English-language debut is not a happy film: it follows the progress of homecare nurse David as he looks after three terminally ill patients, appointed to the next only when the preceding has passed away. While this incessant (or chronic) cycle would drive another man to madness, it is as life support for the grieving David, who performs for strangers, with unusual compassion, a service he had earlier performed for his son.

In the burdening of its principal character, *Chronic* is not unlike the writer-director's previous film, *After Lucia* (2012), which heaped suffering on its bereaved teen protagonist Alejandra, bullied (and beaten and raped) by classmates at her new school. The topicality of Franco's subjects (school-age cruelty and vigilantism, end-of-life care and assisted suicide) would suggest that he wants his films to be seen by a large audience, contributing to, maybe even influencing, the wider discussion of these issues. But if he really wanted his films to be viewed by the general public, would he not invest his distressing themes with humour, as, say, Cristi Puiu's *The Death of Mr Lazarescu* (2005) did with its traumatic narrative? Instead, Franco's flat,



Last embrace: Michael Cristofer as John and Tim Roth as David

matter-of-fact treatment of troubling and morally complex material is an offputting combination for paying audiences. As long as Franco persists in the aseptic, uncommercial presentation of such stories – no score, no exposition, minimal camera movements – it seems doubtful that his films will attract an audience beyond the festival circuit: despite being awarded the Un Certain Regard prize at Cannes, *After Lucia* didn't cross over into UK cinemas, and although *Chronic* (also honoured

at Cannes, with the prize for best screenplay) has done so, it will likely struggle at the box office. While the casting of Tim Roth in the main role may sugar-coat the pill, one wonders if even his fans will pay to see a film about palliative care, especially when there is the alternative of seeing the actor renew his collaboration with Quentin Tarantino in *The Hateful Eight*.

If his fans do see the film, however, they won't be disappointed: he puts in an admirable



Under pressure: Tim Roth appears in every scene and is largely accountable for the mood of a film with scarcely any dialogue

performance under extraordinary pressure — appearing in every scene and largely accountable for the mood of a film with scarcely any dialogue. Franco shows, he doesn't explain — so we can't know at the story's beginning the nature of David's relationship to Sarah, who is so wasted by ill health that she can't wash or feed herself. We don't immediately deduce that David is her nurse; administering a sponge bath and preparing her meals, he might be her husband or other family member. It is Roth's job to keep these possibilities in suspension: not to give away his professional function but instead to allow the action of the film to make it apparent.

David remains a mystery long after we infer his occupation: partly because the palliative care profession is, for many of us, an unknown quantity (what is normal and what is abnormal behaviour for the care-giver?), and partly because Roth's impassivity makes him impossible to read. (The first of these two clauses might be offered as answer to the query at the beginning of this review: perhaps the film was made because the relationship between care professionals and their patients is uncharted territory in cinema, and so, one could argue, a worthy subject for study.) What, for instance, is David's motivation for pretending to a bookshop assistant that he is an architect, like his patient John? Why, after Sarah's funeral, does David tell two strangers that he has lost his wife to Aids, and that her name was Sarah? These particular falsehoods (there are others) cause no one any harm, but the question of how far David's eccentricities range hangs ominously over the film. Are these the actions of a sociopath? Are they fantasies? Or an innocent means of coming to terms with whatever emotions are engendered in a person who spends their daylight hours with the dying?

Except for in the poignant scene where David is reconciled with his college-age daughter Nadia — which serves to show that he is not devoid of feeling, but reserves its open expression for the company of his family — it's anybody's guess what he's thinking. Roth's David is as outwardly stolid as Robert Bresson's mistreated donkey Balthazar and, not dissimilarly, is delivered from one individual to another. He reveals rather less of himself in these successive relationships than do his patient-employers, who display a spectrum of physical and emotional responses to approaching death. John's devastating stroke has left him not only incapacitated but loudly intolerant of the "unbearable" female family members looking stricken at his bedside: he can't conceive of a worse torture than "having to depend on them". Cancer patient Martha, by contrast, tolerates the inattention of her family with almost unthinkable dignity.

While *Chronic* doesn't share the allegorical dimension of Bresson's *Au hasard Balthazar* — metaphor would be out of place in this project, which aspires to fullest formal transparency, its technique calculatedly naive — it's not without spirituality. Yves Cape's lighting of interiors is particularly suggestive: natural light spills, always from a single window, into the film's sickrooms, lending these spaces a hallowed, chapel-like quality. This causes the viewer to look more intently at those interiors, and to be reminded that it is *inside* — among everyday fixtures such as wardrobes, bedside tables and lampshades — that lives go out. Meanwhile David's monastic self-denial — his putting the comfort of his patients before his own —



Tender mercies: Roth with Rachel Pickup as Sarah

underpins the impression that, by caring for others, he hopes to atone for past actions.

It's not revealed whether David believes he has anything to be forgiven for, since all we have to go on is his sphinx-like face. The viewer has to supply the answer to this and to bigger questions, including those provoked by the shocking conclusion, which up-ends all that the previous 90 minutes have taught us to feel about death — that it is a part of life and to be faced, as far as possible, with dry-eyed pragmatism.

It's a contentious ending that could make an audience feel a number of different ways — alienated, condescended to, cheated, taught a lesson. The violent, blink-and-you'll-miss-it

If Michel Franco really wanted his films to be viewed by the general public, would he not invest his distressing themes with humour?

fatality of the film's final moments — a death most unlike those we have witnessed hitherto, arriving without warning or ceremony — ejects the viewer from the comfort zone that Franco has helped to create. If, up to this point, the film has made us feel more accepting of death and its attendant humiliations, the ending seems to say that it was not acceptance we felt, but complacency. Why, it asks, be scandalised by one kind of death and not another? If it was indeed Franco's intention to make us conscious of our hypocrisy, was it essential that he send the message by making his audience jump out of their skins? By this flourish of filmmaking technique, Franco, having methodically concealed his presence for the duration of the film so far, unmasks himself at the 11th hour. The stunt leaves one wondering whether the manipulations of script and camera, the technical challenge of disappearing the director, excited Franco rather more than the honest presentation of his theme. And one wonders whether his self-abnegation was no more than a game, and not in the service of his subject at all. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Gabriel Ripstein
Michel Franco
Moisés Zonana
Gina Kwon
Written by
Michel Franco
Director of Photography
Yves Cape
Edited by
Michel Franco

Julio C. Perez IV
Production Designer
Matthew Luem
Sound Design and Supervision
Frank Gaeta
Costume Designer
Diaz

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de R.L. de C.V.
Production

Companies
Lucía Films presents
in co-production
with Videocine
in association with
Wild Bunch
A film by Michel
Franco
Executive Producers
Emilio Azcárraga Jean
Bernardo Gómez
Tim Roth

Fernando Pérez
Gavilán

Cast
Tim Roth
David
Robin Bartlett
Martha
Michael Cristofer
John
Nailea Norvind

Laura
Rachel Pickup
Sarah
Sarah Sutherland
Nadia
David Dastmalchian
Bernard
Christopher McCann
Robert
Bitsie Tulloch
Lidia
Brenda Wehle

Mildred

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Curzon Film World

Los Angeles, present day. At-home nurse David administers end-of-life care to Aids patient Sarah. At Sarah's funeral, David is approached by a family member who invites him to breakfast, so that they can reminisce about Sarah, but he demurs. Later, alone at a bar, he tells two strangers that Sarah was his wife. David is introduced to his next patient, architect John, who has suffered a debilitating stroke. John is impatient with the women in his family, preferring to watch pornography on his iPad rather than interact with them. David is a conscientious carer, frequently taking on the shifts of other nurses in order to stay with his patient around the clock. Talking to an assistant in a bookshop while buying reading material for John, David pretends

to have John's professional experience. John's family sues David for sexual harassment. A friend refers David to his next patient: cancer sufferer Martha. It emerges that David helped his own young son, who was suffering from terminal cancer, to die; afterwards he moved away from his wife and daughter Nadia. David reconciles with his family after approaching Nadia, who is studying medicine, on campus. Discovering that her cancer has spread and learning of David's past actions, Martha asks him to help her commit suicide. He initially refuses but then relents, reporting the cause of death as cardiac arrest. He takes on a new patient, a 16-year-old boy. While jogging, David — not looking in the direction of onrushing cars — steps out in front of a speeding vehicle.



Sudan impact: Hubert Sauper's self-designed, self-built plane attracts a crowd

We Come as Friends

France/Austria 2014

Director: Hubert Sauper

Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

To shoot *We Come as Friends*, his enraging portrait of South Sudan's transition to world's newest independent state and then world's newest failed state, Hubert Sauper decided he needed a plane. With pockets of the country on fire and warfare a dangerous constant, road travel wasn't an option. Because there were few proper runways, a slow, light plane that could stop quickly in tight spaces was required, so Sauper designed one himself. (It was constructed with an engine donated by Rotax, which in return asked only for thanks in the credits. Later, Sauper told *Film Comment*'s Eric Hynes, he went online and found that the same engine is used to power predator drones: "Whatever you do, you are part of this mess.") The production incurred some degree of danger – one of Sauper's cameramen was shot at, and the director suffered a few months' detention in Libya. None of that is mentioned in the film, however; this is not the type of production to self-righteously underline the director's courage in making it.

The Austrian-born Sauper acknowledges

his status as a French citizen, which makes him complicit with the many 'we's' advancing on exploitably oil-rich lands. Like Werner Herzog struggling to comprehend Kuwait's burning oilfields in *Lessons of Darkness* (1992), Sauper narrates the film from the perspective of an alien visitor. That invader is, granted, not extraterrestrial but merely alien to the land being colonised. Sauper doesn't distinguish morally between the Chinese employees of oil refineries who don't talk to 'the natives' but are sure everything is OK, western 'entrepreneurs' who piously proclaim "it's about developing the country" before whooping it up at the "big bucks" to be made, or Texan missionaries who want the natives to just wear some clothes. No false distinction is made between colonialism and neocolonialism: the film is unambiguously against all outsiders.

Sauper is at least an interloper working for good, leveraging his plane and access to let the new settlers hang themselves with their own rope, balancing their often vile bluntness with testimony from those dispossessed by a government that quickly resorts to illicit land grabs to entice 'development' (with a token fee to be paid to the federal government). In his 2011 film *The Ambassador*, Danish journalist Mads Brügger foregrounded his nerve in instigating situations to entrap and document

corruption in Liberia; Sauper is more prone to sit and wait, refusing to call out his subjects as they unconsciously indict themselves. A typical example (there are many such jaw-dropping moments in the film) is a sequence following a British bomb-disposal expert as he goes from one call to another. "Hopefully, it's a bomb," he says – hopefully, he clarifies, because leftover explosives are what keep him in business. Later, he shows a video he has made of his life in South Sudan, in which chilling by the pool is given equal time with whoopingly detonating explosives. Reflecting on Sudan's plight, he concludes, "There must be a reason they're still 200 years behind the rest of the world." Articulating leftover paternalistic, racist notions while profiting from wreckage remaining after repeated invasions perfectly synthesises old and new imperialisms.

Blunt juxtapositions are routinely caught on the fly. At the opening of a new power plant, the camera pans and racks from the American ambassador to a gun toled by a protecting soldier. Sauper transitions from one segment to another via thematic association rather than time or geography; this sequence is preceded by one at a bar, where a government figure offers Sauper free land for 'development' while insisting, "This isn't corruption"; it's succeeded by a scene examining the land-



Hillary Clinton is seen noting that 'the world' will turn to the region 'to be its bread basket'; it sounds like a thinly veiled threat

handover documents that villagers either didn't sign or whose content they didn't understand. Through such juxtapositions, the film creates a polemical chain of argument.

The film's title is ominous, a clear warning that someone is about to get fleeced. While he interviews members of a Chinese oil crew, Sauper sets them against a monitor showing *Star Trek*, a *Star Wars* film and finally 2001: *A Space Odyssey*. It's the first that's most pertinent: Captain Kirk and Spock meeting alien life, proclaiming, "We come in peace, but" – brandishing laser guns – "we'll defend ourselves if necessary." When Hillary Clinton is later seen on a TV noting that Africa is home to most of the planet's arable land and "the world" will turn to the region "to be its bread basket", it sounds less like a hope and more like a thinly veiled threat. (There's plenty of TV news here, but always filmed from within a room rather than filling up the screen as a standalone clip; Sauper pointedly refuses to align himself with establishment journalism.) Clinton's soundbite is a politer form of the cynicism of the Western 'businessman' who explains his intentions to a Sudanese representative by colonially appropriating a proverb from the "Native Americans": "We don't own anything, we just borrow it for a lifetime" – meaning that everyone should get on with the programme of giving unquestioned long-term leases of undeveloped land to Western corporations for no money.

Sometimes Sauper is clearly too disgusted to refrain from more overt comment: after following a group of missionaries who make distributing clothes a top priority because nudity is "against the Bible", he abruptly cuts the audio out when a woman fumbling for soft/non-racist euphemisms asks, "How should I say this?" What's missing is the answer: don't.

We Come as Friends is more elegant and less overtly didactic than *Darwin's Nightmare*, Sauper's 2004 examination of economic neocolonialism in Africa, which was structured around the fallout from the introduction of non-native fish into Lake Victoria in Tanzania. Digital cameras are now capable of providing far sharper and more arresting imagery than the fuzzy gear Sauper worked with on that film, which helps. *We Come as Friends* is also far less prone to bluntly articulating a thesis through title cards and the foregrounding of the director's



Donkey business

role in uncovering a shameful situation. (As Sauper told Hynes, "I take out a lot of what was in *Darwin's Nightmare* – the denouncing of the scandal.") Early on, Sauper shows a railroad cutting across the land while, in voiceover, speaking of the arbitrary borderlines laid down by Victorian colonialists. The camera catches a sun flare that bisects this line at a diagonal angle – an elegant metaphor for creating a new political/historical geography to counter the ones imposed on a still subjugated country. 📺

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Hubert Sauper
Gabriele Kranzelbinder

Written by

Hubert Sauper

Edited by

Hubert Sauper

Film Editors

Hubert Sauper

Original Film Music

Composed by

Slim Twig

Sound Design

Veronika Hlawatsch

Production Companies

Adelante Films,

KGP Kranzelbinder

Gabriele Production,

Jean Labadie present

in co-production

with ARTE France

Cinéma a film by

Hubert Sauper

With the support

of Le Pacte, ARTE

France, Canal+

Austrian Film

Institute, Eurimages,

ORF Film/Fernseh-

Abkommen,

Vienna Filmfonds

In Colour

[1.78:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Le Pacte



Jesting pilot: Hubert Sauper enjoys a joke with local troops

Sudan, 2011. Against a background of ongoing civil conflict, a referendum is held to determine whether largely Christian South Sudan should become independent from the majority Muslim north. Documentarian Hubert Sauper pilots his plane across South Sudan for a wide-ranging survey of the country in the years leading up to and after the referendum. At an oil-drilling station he observes a group of Chinese employees who make up the bulk of the workforce; he also accompanies a bomb-disposal expert on a typical day at work. A group of Christian missionaries distribute clothes (in accordance with their belief that native nudity is against the Bible) and solar-powered radios tuned to evangelical stations. At a new school, children without uniforms report that they're beaten for this. At a bar, Sauper is told by an official that natives will donate local land for free, with only a token payment to the government being required. A new electrical plant is opened, with an American ambassador in attendance. In the wake of the referendum, there is an influx of western businesses into the country; vendors and entrepreneurs are observed at a conference.

Alvin and the Chipmunks The Road Chip

USA 2015, Director: Walt Becker, Certificate U 91m 52s

Reviewed by Violet Lucca

A small stream of pee and a rodent turd drop out of a teenager's jeans while he's being scanned at the airport. Simon, one of the trio of singing chipmunks, can't afford a plane ticket to Miami and is nervously clinging to the boy's leg. This is but one of many metatextual moments in *Alvin and the Chipmunks: The Road Chip* – recall the poop-munching gag of the franchise's first film.

But there's little attempt here to make the CGI furballs blend with the live action, and this half-heartedness extends to the emotions (and jokes) in the script: the chipmunks journey from LA to Miami to prevent their human father figure Dave getting engaged (they reckon he'll ditch them once he starts his own family), chased all the while by an overzealous sky marshal (Tony Hale).

This lethal combination of laziness and insincerity makes one pine for the Travers/McKenna films of the 1960s – even if poor Bill was getting his arm bitten by a live otter on a daily basis, at least *Ring of Bright Water* featured beautiful cinematography and made children feel *something*. ☹

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Janice Karman Ross Bagdasarian	Finance LLC (in the US only) ©Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, Monarchy Enterprises S.a.r.l. and TSG Entertainment Finance LLC (in all other territories)	Williams-Paisley Samantha Josh Green Miles Bella Thorne Ashley Grey Uzo Aduba TSA officer Flula Borg man behind mask Retta party planner Eddie Steeples Barry Justin Long voice of Alvin Matthew Gray Gubler voice of Simon Jess McCartney voice of Theodore Kaley Cuoco voice of Eleanor Anna Faris voice of Jeanette Christina Applegate voice of Brittany
Written by Randi Mayem Singer Adam Szykiel Based on the characters Alvin and The Chipmunks created by Ross Bagdasarian and The Chipettes created by Janice Karman	Production Companies Fox 2000 Pictures and Regency Enterprises present a Bagdasarian Company production Made in association with TSG Entertainment With assistance from the Georgia Film, Music & Digital Entertainment Office	Dolby Digital/ Datasat In Colour [L85:1]
Director of Photography Peter Lyons Collier Edited by Ryan Foley Production Designer Richard Holland Music Mark Mothersbaugh Sound Mixer Todd Weaver Costume Designer Mary Claire Hannan Animation Supervisor Matthew O'Callaghan	Executive Producers Karen Rosenfeldt Arnon Milchan John Starke Steve Waterman	Distributor 20th Century Fox International (UK)
©Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, Regency Entertainment (USA), Inc. and TSG Entertainment	Cast Jason Lee Dave Tony Hale Agent Suggs Kimberly	

Los Angeles, present day. Dave, father figure to singing chipmunks Alvin, Simon and Theodore, introduces them to his new girlfriend Samantha and her son Miles. The latter bullies the chipmunks. When Dave brings home an engagement ring, the chipmunks worry that he is about to propose to Samantha and make Miles their stepbrother. When Dave and Samantha leave for a party in Miami, Miles and the chipmunks join forces and decide to follow, determined to stop the engagement. Miles sneaks the chipmunks aboard a plane, but their antics force an emergency landing in Texas. While busking to make money for bus fares, Miles and the chipmunks bond. Dave arrives and drives them to Miami. It transpires that Dave was simply looking after the engagement ring for a colleague. Dave legally adopts the chipmunks.

Amazonia

France/Brazil 2013
Director: Thierry Ragobert

Reviewed by Alex Dudok de Wit

Monkeys are man's closest kin in the animal kingdom. They share a good deal of our physical and psychological traits, and so lend themselves to anthropomorphism. As 'simpler', less civilised images of ourselves, simians in fiction often serve to reflect some notionally wholly human characteristic. Think of the infatuation of King Kong, or the sheer avarice of *The Jungle Book's* King Louie (who is effectively a man without the technological know-how).

The unnamed capuchin at the heart of *Amazonia* distils a different human attribute, one more rarely associated with monkeys: naivety. Raised as a pet in urban Brazil, the hero of this documentary-style family-oriented fiction crash-lands in the depths of the rainforest and is left to fend for himself. Everything to him is a source of wonder (skittering leaf insects, rainbow-billed toucans) or fear (crocs, snakes, storms). In a neat twist, the animal becomes our avatar in a nature documentary: we only see what he sees. But of course the viewer, raised on David Attenborough programmes and YouTube videos of exotic fauna, is probably more at home in this environment than the monkey.

What ensues is a sort of simian *Bildungsroman*, in which our hero evolves from callow urbanite into a swaggering denizen of the jungle, complete with indigenous girlfriend. The film is shot in an observational style, almost without recourse to special effects; the capuchin's interactions with others are conjured up through editing. There are almost no humans, no dialogue. Thierry Ragobert, an acclaimed director of nature docs in France, trusts that we don't need a cute voiceover or talking animals to be entertained.

Amazonia wears its plot lightly. It is episodic and a bit plodding at times, though the capuchin's frustrated attempts to join a troop of fellow monkeys gives some thrust to the second half. Moments of comedy or romance languidly give way to non-diegetic shots of beasts and bugs going about their business. There is suspense – notably a scene involving a stealthy jaguar – but none of the sense of Darwinian ruthlessness

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Stéphane Millière Laurent Baujard Fabiano Gullane Caio Gullane Debora Ivanov Gabriel Lacerda	Photography Gustavo Hadba Manuel Têran Jerome Bouvier Editor Nadine Verdier Artistic Consultant Araquem Alcantara Original Music Bruno Coulais Sound Eric Boisteau Miqueias Motta Francis Wagnier Olivier Goinard	©Biloba Films, Gullane, Gédéon Programmes, France 2 Cinéma, Globo Filmes, Imovision, Le Pacte Production Companies Biloba Films and Gullane present in co-production with France 2 Cinéma, Le Pacte, Gédéon Programmes, Imovision, Globo Filmes	with the participation of Canal+, France Télévisions, Riofilme, Telecine with the support of Natura, Tetra Pak, CNC - Nouvelles Technologies en Productions, Programme Media de L'Union Européenne, Procirop-Angoa with the support of Ancine/Ministério da Cultura, Fundo Setorial do	Audiovisual, Finep/Ministério da Ciência, Tecnologia e Inovação A film by Thierry Ragobert A Biloba Films, Gullane production in co-production with France 2 Cinéma, Le Pacte, Gédéon Programmes, Imovision, Globo Filmes Developed with the support Dévelopimages 1 & 2	Dolby Digital In Colour [L85:1] Some screenings presented in 3D Distributor Kaleidoscope Film Distribution
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Rio de Janeiro, the present. A caged capuchin monkey is loaded on to a biplane while his owner, a young girl, bids him farewell. As the plane flies over the Amazon rainforest, bad weather causes it to crash. The pilot flees. The monkey, left to his own devices, explores the forest.

In the quasi-documentary scenes that follow, we observe the monkey as he forages for food, sails down a river on a tree trunk and meets a colourful cast of fauna. Most are benign, though the monkey also



Into the wild: *Amazonia*

that runs through Jean-Jacques Annaud's *The Bear* (1988), the genre's high-water mark.

Which is all very well for younger audiences. *Amazonia* is unabashedly kid-oriented: immersive, playful and heavy on visual spectacle. (The 2D version I saw was palpable enough – I dread to think what 3D does to those bristly tarantula legs.) The capuchin is a wonderfully empathetic figure – his wide eyes alone express more than Eddie Redmayne's array of tics in *The Danish Girl*. His complete integration into the jungle biome attests to the skill of the editing (video and sound – the foley is ostentatiously brilliant).

There is plenty for adults to enjoy, though they will balk at the dodgy CGI and cloying music. They will also regret the wispieness of the story, noticing that there are no substantial supporting characters and many a redundant scene that fades to black without much having happened. The film is resolutely light-hearted. It is as if the filmmakers are afraid to come across as puffed or moralistic: just as a message about the destructive effects of logging begins to take shape, they pull their punches. This may dismay viewers accustomed to the sort of hard-hitting, politically aware environmental doc that is flourishing at the moment. But *Amazonia* isn't aimed at them, and no measure of cynicism can deny the film its simple – and exportable – charm. ☹

Backtrack

Australia/United Kingdom 2014
Director: Michael Petroni
Certificate 15 90m 9s

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

The spirit of M. Night Shyamalan's *The Sixth Sense* hangs over this Australian-made would-be puzzler, in which it doesn't take Adrien Brody's sad-eyed psychiatrist too long to twig that his current crop of patients are all ghosts – one of them even says as much. Viewers who concern themselves with the practicalities of how he actually pays for his office doing this kind of work will buy out at this early stage, though the contrivances pile up still further. When they're not appearing suddenly in the frame, in a device aiming at spine-chilling frisson but soon becoming ridiculous through overuse, the spirits lead Brody's convincingly pained protagonist back to his hometown and a rendezvous with a traumatic night in his teenage past.

Writer-director Michael Petroni establishes a stately underlying rhythm to scenes that in normal circumstances might deliver gravitas. The film is undone, however, by the sheer unlikelihood of its conveniently assembled central mystery, in which the unquiet spirits prove so resourceful in their physical interventions in the real world that we're left wondering whether they need Brody's help at all.

Not a success overall then, though it's worth noting the visually striking use made of Sydney's elevated rail lines, and indeed cinematographer Stefan Duscio's facility for highlighting characters against inky-black night skies. 📺

Credits and Synopsis

Producer

Jamie Hilton
Antonia Barnard
Michael Petroni

Written by

Michael Petroni

Director of Photography

Stefan Duscio

Film Editor

Martin Connor

Production Designer

Elizabeth Mary Moore

Music

Dale Cornelius

Supervising Sound Editor

Will Ward

Costume Designer

Justin Seymour

Companies

Screen Australia and Bankside Films

©Backtrack Films

Pty Limited, AP

Facilities Pty Ltd,

Screen Australia

and Screen NSW

Production

Companies

Screen Australia

and Bankside Films

present a See

Pictures production

in association with

Screen NSW and

Deluxe Australia

in association with

Headgear Films,

Metrol Technology

A film by Michael

Petroni

Financed with

the assistance of

Head Gear Films/

Metrol Technology,

Kreofilms

Produced in

association with

Deluxe Australia

Financed with

assistance from

Screen NSW

and its Regional

Filming Fund

Developed with

the assistance

of Australian

Government/

Screen Australia

Principal Investor

Australian

Government/

Screen Australia

Executive Producers

Phil Hunt

Compton Ross

David Evans

Cast

Adrien Brody

Peter Bower

George Shevtsov

William Bower

Robin McLeavy

Barbara Henning

Sam Neill

Duncan Stewart

Chloe Bayliss

Elizabeth Valentine

Mal Kennard

Barry

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Arrow Films

Sydney, present day. Recovering from the loss of his daughter Evie in a road accident, psychiatrist Peter Bower realises that the patients sent to him by his former mentor Duncan Stewart are, in fact, all ghosts. Discovering that they all died in a train crash on the same day in 1987, Peter returns to his hometown, where the accident happened; he and his friend Barry witnessed the crash as teenagers. The ghost of dead teenager Elizabeth Valentine helps Peter to uncover the suppressed memory that his own father, a local policeman, caused the rail crash while raping her; her spirit then brought about his death by an onrushing train.

His conscience now clear, Peter says goodbye to his own departed daughter.

A Bigger Splash

Italy/France 2015
Director: Luca Guadagnino
Certificate 15 124m 21s



Making waves: Matthias Schoenaerts, Ralph Fiennes

See Feature
on page 42

Reviewed by Tony Rayns

Spoiler alert: this review

reveals a plot twist

Luca Guadagnino's remake of Jacques Deray's *La Piscine* (1968) is a chamber piece with

wide horizons: a hell-is-other-people *Huis clos* set amid Mediterranean seascapes, volcanic rocks and references to drowning refugees and migrants. The original's tight nexus of Riviera high-life, epicurean appetites and fatal attractions is transposed to the far less sophisticated milieu of Pantelleria, an island south of Sicily which still proudly shows its roots with Catholic saint-day festivals and artisanal mozzarella-making. The four central characters are interlopers in this world but made very welcome by the locals. The way they act out their return-of-the-repressed drama, though, has little to do with the convivial setting; the main thing is that the sweltering climate justifies a lot of stripping off. Whether the sexual and emotional shenanigans gain or lose from being set in Pantelleria is moot.

The four protagonists devolve into a triangle (with a rather complicated backstory) and a supporting provocateuse. Marianne (Tilda Swinton) is an ageing rock star who has lost her voice; she is recuperating from surgery to her throat, speaking only rarely in a hoarse whisper to protect her larynx. Flashbacks reveal that she commanded stadium-sized audiences and went for the androgynous persona and outré costumes of 70s David Bowie, combined with Mick Jagger's stage swagger and Michael Stipe's slash of colour across the eyes. She now lives very happily with Paul (Matthias Schoenaerts), a sometime video cameraman who's in remission from alcoholism after injuring himself in a car crash and spending time in rehab. Their lives are turned upside down by the man who first introduced them to each other: Marianne's former record producer/lover Harry (Ralph Fiennes), who shows up with next to no warning on a visit with his nubile, newly discovered daughter Penelope (Dakota Johnson)

in tow. Harry very soon makes it clear to Marianne that he wants to win her back from Paul. It's implied that Harry may have brought along Penelope (who may *not* be his daughter; there hasn't been a DNA test) specifically to offside Paul.

Harry has all the charm and finesse of Anish Kapoor's wax battering ram. He has no self-censorship filter, is always the life and soul of the party, railroads his own wishes through anyone else's objections and frequently gets naked around the pool at the villa. He has primed Penelope to ask Paul intrusive and insensitive questions about his alcoholism and the car crash, so the two visitors present a sustained assault on the couple's secluded calm. But Guadagnino is much more interested in giving his cast room to 'perform' than in honing a plot: the storytelling is languorous and, in fact, so long-drawn-out that it's a mystery why the hosts don't tell the guests to leave long before their provocations lead to Harry's death in the pool. The film is marginally shorter than *La Piscine* but feels very much longer. A thriller it is not.

In his press-kit interview, Guadagnino waffles at length about a "fracture" between the rock 'n' roll excesses of the late 20th century and "a sort of new conservatism", which he relates to a generational shift. But that suggests that Penelope (the only young person involved) is defined by her distance from Harry's behaviour and enthusiasms; it seems more salient that she alternates between stereotypically petulant American teen and cruel nymphet. As reimaged by Guadagnino and his writer David Kajganich, the story definitely does now contrast Harry's Peter Pan-like refusal to grow up with Marianne's need and desire for a quieter life, although the flashbacks are used to express her still-latent addiction to fast living. In any case, the silly pretensions that have made Guadagnino such a *bête noire* to Italian critics are substantially eclipsed by the generally diverting spectacle of four excellent actors letting it all hang out in the service of a torrid, high-class soap. ➡

At its best *A Bigger Splash* is better than soap. Marianne's near-silence (apparently Swinton's own idea; Guadagnino admits that it has spared us reams of dialogue) makes her mime of orgasm when Paul goes down on her all the more ecstatic. And Fienness is outstanding in Harry's two musical set pieces: an unstoppable action replay of how he produced *Voodoo Lounge* for the Rolling Stones, and a scene-stealing turn at a karaoke night. The enigma that hangs over the whole thing is not so much whether Paul is guilty of murder or manslaughter in the pool but rather why Guadagnino nicked the title of a gay David Hockney painting (and a Jack Hazan docudrama) for his remake. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Michael Costigan
Luca Guadagnino
Screenplay
David Kajganich
Adaptation and Dialogue
Jacques Deray
Jean Claude Carrière
Based on the film
La Piscine Directed
by Jacques Deray
Based on an original
screenplay by Alain
Page and on his
novel *La Piscine*
Cinematography
Yorick Le Saux
Edited by
Walter Fasano
Production Design
Maria Djurkovic
Production Sound Mixer
Yves-Marie Omnes
Costume Design
Giulia Piersanti

Production Companies
Studio Canal
presents a Frenesy
Film production
in association

with Cota Films
A Studiocanal
presentation of
a Frenesy Film
production
in association with
Cota Films and GEM
in co-operation with
Regione Siciliana
Tourism, Sport
and Entertainment
Department, Sicilia
Film Commission
in the context of
the Program Sensi
Contemporanei
Cinema
with the support
of the Patterleria
Municipality
in association with
Morato Pane S.P.A.,
Carandini, Groupama
Assicurazioni S.P.A.,
Biscottificio Verona
S.R.L., Cinefinance
Italia S.R.L.
with the contribution
of Regione Lazio
Regional Fund
for Cinema and
Audiovisual Sector
Executive Producers

Marco Morabito
David Kajganich
Olivier Courson
Ron Halpern

Cast

Ralph Fienness
Harry Hawkes
Dakota Johnson
Penelope Lannier
Matthias Schoenaerts
Paul de Smedt
Tilda Swinton
Marianne Lane
Aurore Clément
Mireille
Elena Bucci
Clara
Lily McMenamy
Sylvie
Corrado Guzzanti
La Mattina,
police marshal

In Colour
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Studiocanal Limited

Present day. Stadium-filling rock star Marianne Lane has retreated to the Mediterranean island Pantelleria to convalesce from throat surgery; her lover Paul is teetotal since nearly dying in a car crash. Their idyllic villa life is disrupted by the surprise arrival of her former lover Harry Hawkes, accompanied by Penelope, his belatedly discovered American daughter, who says she's 22. Despite Harry's raucous and lubricious behaviour, Marianne invites them to stay. Next day Harry cooks and invites along two old communist friends, Mireille and Sylvie, who suggest visiting the island's San Gaetano festival that evening. Harry starts trying to win Marianne back from Paul, while Penelope needles Paul with overly personal questions. Next day, while Harry is out shopping with Marianne, Penelope makes a serious play for Paul. He takes her to a secluded cove where they encounter newly landed migrants – and then make love. Returning to the empty villa, Harry forces himself on Marianne, but she insists she won't leave Paul. After an edgy dinner, Harry goes out drinking again and returns to find that Paul has fallen off the wagon. Harry provokes a fight, and Paul semi-accidentally drowns him in the pool. During the police investigation, it emerges that Penelope is only 17 and is fluent in Italian; she is allowed to leave and flies out, secretly distraught. Marianne and Paul fear that suspicion of murder is falling on them, but when their car is stopped by cop La Mattina it's only because he wants Marianne to sign one of her CDs.

Capture the Flag

Director: Enrique Gato
Certificate PG 94m 26s

Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

Castilian animator Enrique Gato made his name in Spain with the creation of Tadeo Jones, an Indiana Jones parody reprised over several shorts and later the feature-length *Tad, the Lost Explorer* (2012). As Gato's first project without the Jones character, *Capture the Flag* retains its predecessor's rambunctious, irreverent flavour, albeit with an added dose of sentimentality that suggests an attempt to bottle the pathos suffusing some of Pixar's best work. It's also, in its all-American trappings, an evident calling card to a wider audience. Yet while slickly produced (in competent but unremarkable 3D) and fast-paced, it's rarely distinctive, and hampered by hollow characters and often crude dialogue (the product of four writers).

Capture the Flag's questing spirit is 12-year-old Mike Goldwing, the son and grandson of Nasa astronauts. Despite this illustrious lineage, dad Scott and retired grandpa Frank haven't spoken in decades, a mysterious estrangement that's given a faintly ridiculous explanation much later. There are echoes of Christopher Nolan's *Interstellar* in the story's establishing of Nasa as a dormant force, a relic whose control rooms are full of antiquated equipment. In contrast, power-mad billionaire tycoon Richard Carson has built his own state-of-the-art rocket and is plotting a mission to mine the terrifyingly powerful Helium 3 energy from the moon's surface. Broadcasting a mocked-up film that depicts a Stanley Kubrick lookalike 'directing' the Apollo 11 landings, Carson convinces the wider world of their fabrication. Nasa counters by initiating its own moon launch, hoping to stop the tycoon destroying the US flag and therefore eradicating all evidence of the 1969 landmark. But when an accident sidelines Scott, it's somehow Mike, his friend Amy, Frank and an intrepid pet chameleon who end up blasting off in the rusty Saturn V rocket.

The preamble to lift-off contains some nicely handled sequences: Mike, Amy and their computer-nerd friend Marty's infiltration of the Nasa launch site; an initially blissful test



Moonstruck: Capture the Flag

flight that goes awry when sabotaged. Plus, it's a shrewd narrative ploy to have Mike and the dour grandparent he's never known stuck in a claustrophobic, high-pressure situation. Yet this promising scenario has a curious dearth of emotional pull thanks to the mostly thin characterisation. After a landing scene that succeeds in conveying a sense of wide-eyed wonder, the frantic battle for the flag that ensues on the moon's surface is entertaining in bursts but predictable. Carson, a messianic figure who seems to have an inexplicably pervasive influence on a dim public, is a monotonous villain who becomes more grating as the film wears on. Taxing comic relief is mostly reserved for Marty, who, left behind on Earth to annoy the Nasa controllers, is nonetheless instrumental in saving the day when communication is lost.

The solid CG animation doesn't offer anything new, but there are incidental pleasures – the evident fondness for the texture of outmoded machinery; lonely lunar vistas; Frank's grizzled visage (recalling a pixelated Tommy Lee Jones). Otherwise, *Capture the Flag's* trip to the moon feels underpowered. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Jordi Gasull
Nicolás Matji
Edmon Roch
Ghislain Barrois
Álvaro Augustín
Javier Ugarte
Ignacio
Fernández-Vega
Written by

Jordi Gasull
Javier Barreira
Neil Landau
Based on the
original idea by
Jordi Gasull
Pabxi Amezcua
Editor
Alexander Adams
Music

Diego Navarro
Sound
Oriol Tarragó
Visual Design by
Lightbox Animation
Studios

Production Companies
Paramount Pictures

presents a 4 Cats
Pictures, Telecinco
Cinema, Telefonica
Studios, Los Rockets
La Película AIE,
Lightbox Animation,
Ikiru Films production
in association with
Mediaset España,
Movistar+

Executive Producers
Axel Kuschewatzki
Gabriel Arias-Salgado

Dolby Atmos
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Some screenings
presented in 3D

Distributor
Paramount
Pictures UK

Spanish
theatrical title
Atrapa la bandera

US, present day. Twelve-year-old Mike Goldwing longs to reunite his father Scott and grandfather Frank, both Nasa astronauts who have been estranged for decades. Declaring the Apollo 11 moon landings to have been fabricated, billionaire tycoon Richard Carson announces that he will fly to the moon himself to mine Helium 3, an ultra-powerful energy source. In response, Nasa plans to launch the aged Saturn V rocket, hoping to prevent Carson from destroying the American flag that proves the 1969 landings. Scott is selected to man the mission, with Frank as his reluctant trainer, but he has to drop out injured after Carson sabotages a test flight. Determined to be part

of the mission, Mike and his friends Amy and Marty infiltrate the launch site. Due to Carson's skulduggery, the rocket launches early with only Mike, Amy and Frank on board. Frank and Amy save each other's lives when Carson's shuttle attacks Saturn V. On the moon, Mike and Amy secure the flag but Carson takes Frank hostage. Mike and Amy agree a trade with Carson, who plans to use Helium 3 for world domination. When Carson tries to kill them, the kids escape with Frank and the flag. Carson pursues them, but he and his base are destroyed. Frank reveals that he missed the Apollo mission because he caught chickenpox from Scott. Back on Earth, the two reconcile.

Concussion

USA/Australia/United Kingdom 2015

Director: Peter Landesman

Certificate 12A 122m 39s

Reviewed by Kate Stables

One of the challenges for Hollywood in committing a true story to the screen is how to fit unwieldy real life into genre-shaped moulds. *Concussion*, an intermittently gripping account of how Pittsburgh pathologist Bennet Omalu discovered what a career's worth of American football concussions does to many players' brains, isn't a natural fit for any of them, but it takes on all comers. The end result is a hybrid sports/medical/whistleblower biopic that, like the sportsmen it champions, is fiercely determined to get to the end of its game.

The film's account of a lone brave voice versus a vast business (the National Football League's projected revenue for 2015 was over \$12 billion) isn't a particularly novel angle. But writer-director Peter Landesman exhibits a commendable rigour in depicting the NFL's bad-mouthing, foot-dragging years of refusal to take Omalu's breakthrough diagnosis seriously. He's greatly helped by Will Smith's affable, deceptively easy-going portrayal of Omalu, presenting the devout Nigerian workaholic as a relatable, lightly accented striver chasing the American Dream. As in 2006's *The Pursuit of Happyness*, Smith deftly hymns the twin virtues of hard work and hope, turning Omalu's stubborn eccentricities (he talks to his corpses because "The dead are my patients") into endearing tenacity.

Whistleblower dramas need a sense of urgency, however, and the slow unwinding of Omalu's battle to get 'chronic traumatic encephalopathy' (CTE) recognised, after revelatory lab work on the brain of ex-Pittsburgh Steeler Mike Webster reveals a sludge of protein deposits, doesn't possess much of it early on. To fill in the gaps between autopsies and professional trashings by the NFL's arrogant medical specialists, the film whips the harassment and stalking experienced

by Omalu and his boss Dr Cyril Wecht into a rather tacked-on thriller plot. Wound around this is an earnest romance, as Omalu falls for Kenyan immigrant Prema (a dignified but under-utilised Gugu Mbatha-Raw). Respectful to a fault, the film doesn't want to show its hero as anything less than admirable, even under extreme pressure. So it lacks the abrasive or angry notes that gave tension to *Silkwood* (1983) and *The Insider* (1999), or the obsessive evidence gathering of *Erin Brockovich* (2000).

Popular science explanations of how CTE develops, using toy brains in jars of liquid and human-versus-woodpecker comparisons, open up the medical details neatly enough for the viewer. But most startling are the stats Omalu offers up: a human is concussed at 60G; a normal football concussion is 100G. Omalu estimated that Webster had received 17,000 concussions during his career.

Perceptive about American football's quasi-religious status ("The NFL owns a day of the week – the day the Church used to own") and its huge role in American life, from Pee Wee games to fierce hometown team pride, *Concussion* has more thematic than narrative nuance. It doesn't soft-pedal the racism and anti-immigrant aggression that Omalu was subject to, nor the neurological sufferings of real-life CTE victims such as Webster, Justin Strzelczyk and NFL icon Dave Duerson, seen in scene-slivers of bewildered agony. And in place of finger-wagging homilies, there's an appreciation of football's compulsive power and savage beauty from Alex Baldwin's guilt-drenched Steelers neurosurgeon. Flawed as a film but surprisingly brave as a project, *Concussion* parades its unpopular truths without apology. It may even turn out to have an effect on its audience that will be longer lasting and rather more important than its box-office performance. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Ridley Scott
Giannina Scott
David Wolthoff
Larry Shuman
Elizabeth Cantillon

Written by

Peter Landesman
Based on the GQ article *Game Brain* by Jeanne Marie Laskas

Director of Photography

Salvatore Totino

Edited by

William Goldenberg

Production Designer

David Crank

Music

James Newton Howard

Sound Mixers

Lee Orloff

James Emswiler

Costume Designer

Dayna Pink

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Film Corporation, Village Roadshow

Films North America Inc., Village Roadshow

Films (BVI) Limited

Production Companies

Columbia Pictures

presents in

association with

LStar Capital, Village

Roadshow Pictures

a Scott Free, The

Shuman Company,

Cara Films, The

Cantillon Company

production

Executive Producers

David Crockett

Michael Schaefer

Ben Waisbren

Bruce Berman

Greg Basser

Cast

Will Smith

Dr Bennet Omalu

Alec Baldwin

Dr Julian Bailes

Gugu Mbatha-Raw

Prema Mutiso

Arless Howard

Dr Joseph Maroon

Paul Reiser

Dr Elliot Pellman

Luke Wilson

Roger Goodell

Adele

Akinuoye-Agbaje

Dave Duerson

Mike O'Malley

Daniel Sullivan

David Morse

Mike Webster

Albert Brooks

Dr Cyril Wecht

L. Scott Caldwell

Waters' mother

Hill Harper

Christopher Jones

Richard T. Jones

Andre Waters

Eddie Marsan

Dr Steven DeKosky

Stephen Moyer

Dr Ron Hamilton

Bitsie Tulloch

Keana Strzelczyk

Matthew Willig

Justin Strzelczyk

Dan Ziskie

Paul Tagliabue

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2:35:1]

Distributor

Sony Pictures
Releasing UK

Pittsburgh, 2002. Workaholic Nigerian pathologist Bennet Omalu does detailed self-financed lab work on retired Pittsburgh Steelers player Mike Webster's brain following his sudden death. Omalu suspects that the widespread protein deposits he discovers were caused by repeated football concussions, which produced Webster's severe psychological and neurological symptoms. Omalu's medical paper detailing his discovery of CTE (chronic traumatic encephalopathy) alarms the National Football League, which dismisses his findings. Subsequent autopsies on two more ex-Pittsburgh Steelers also show CTE. Neurologist and Steelers team doctor Julian Bailes joins Omalu to tackle

the NFL. An NFL concussion summit rebuffs Bailes' presentation of Omalu's findings. Omalu's boss is arrested on fraud charges; his new wife Prema miscarries after they are stalked and harassed. They move to California. Dave Duerson, an ex-player and NFL official who had been against Omalu's findings, commits suicide having donated his brain to Omalu. It tests positive for CTE. Omalu addresses an NFL players' conference on concussion and CTE. He is offered the post of chief medical examiner in Washington, but turns it down.

Captions reveal that Omalu eventually became a professor of pathology at the University of California, Davis, and an American citizen.

Dirty Grandpa

USA 2015

Director: Dan Mazer

Certificate 15 101m 56s

Reviewed by Leigh Singer

From its woeful opening credits onwards, with Robert De Niro badly Photoshopped into a montage of family snapshots, everything about *Dirty Grandpa* feels second-hand and second-rate. Even the title clearly borrows from the trend of adding the prefix 'bad' to a traditionally noble social position – Santa, teacher – for instant vulgar, high-concept comedy. One readily imagines that had Johnny Knoxville and his Jackass cohorts not recently claimed the *Bad Grandpa* moniker, the filmmakers here would have opportunistically seized that too, alongside its grandfather-grandson road-trip premise.

If his co-stars and crew have perhaps assembled to tick off the 'working with Robert De Niro' box on their résumés, it's baffling to imagine what drew the star to a role involving masturbating naked over porn, ogling every bikini-clad body on ostentatious display and performing karaoke rap, complete with the N-word (though only with a smitten black audience's permission). Given such outlandish requirements, it's a relief that De Niro does at least tone down the frantic mugging that has marred previous comedic lows such as *We're No Angels* (1989) and *The Adventures of Rocky & Bullwinkle* (2000).

Yet, in essence, De Niro isn't playing a character at all. Dick Kelly, the grandpa of the title, is simply a writer's grab bag of politically incorrect insults and postures, devoid of any inner life or genuine emotion. When he lists all the members of the Wu-Tang Clan, it's because it's supposedly shocking that an elderly white man could do so, rather than illuminating any cultural curiosity. When he demands sex from a young woman, the film shirks exploring a grief-stricken septuagenarian, raging against the dying of the light, for the easy option of sniggering at De Niro chasing jailbait. A potentially sobering visit to Kelly's near-senile former marine comrade (Danny Glover, wasted) elicits scant introspection.

At a certain point, the film's mile-wide malicious streak, shot through with gay panic and misogyny, momentarily suggests it's pushing for the scorched-earth gambit of a *Stepbrothers* or *Borat* (which director Dan Mazer co-scripted), where excess becomes a kind of gonzo performance stunt. Yet even this is undone when the film timidly covers its bets with Dick's cloyingly earnest, unconvincing last-ditch redemption project for his emotionally and professionally stultified grandson. A film like *Bad Santa* works because its antihero's misanthropy is eventually



Bad fellas: Zac Efron, Robert De Niro

hamstrung by its own limitations; here, ex-Green Beret Dick's motto 'De oppresso liber' – 'to free the oppressed' – effectively means maintaining wealthy white male privilege. So much for fighting the power.

Amid this juvenile sensationalism and pedestrian filmmaking (when in doubt, use slow motion), the rare sharp one-liner has an inadvertent shock value. As Dick's grandson Jason, Zac Efron is nothing if not game at enduring repeat humiliations, and the constant digs at his preppy manner ("It looks like Abercrombie fucked Fitch" being the pick of the bunch) occasionally amuse. Only Aubrey Plaza, as older-man-fixated Lenore, locates her own twisted wavelength. It may mean abandoning any pretence at essaying a three-dimensional human being, but at least she sporadically jolts both De Niro and this grindingly joyless film from its smug, domineering comfort zone. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Barry Josephson
Michael Simkin
Jason Barrett
Bill Block
Written by
John M. Phillips
Director of Photography
Eric Edwards
Edited by
Anne McCabe
Production Designer
William Arnold
Music
Michael Andrews
Sound Mixer
Jay Meagher
Costume Designer
Christie Wittenborn

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Production Companies
BillBlock Media,
QED International
and Josephson
Entertainment

present a film
by Dan Mazer
Executive Producers
Sasha Shapiro
Anton Lessine
John Friedberg
Michael Flynn
John M. Phillips

Cast
Robert De Niro
Dick Kelly
Zac Efron
Jason Kelly
Aubrey Plaza
Lenore
Zoe Deutch
Shadia
Julianne Hough
Meredith
Jason Mantzoukas
Tan Pam
Danny Glover
Stinky
Brandon Mychal Smith
Tyrone

Jeffrey Bowyer-Chapman
Bradley
Adam Pally
cousin Nick
Jake Picking
Cody
Mo Collins
Officer Finch
Henry Zebrowski
Officer Reiter
Dermot Mulroney
David Kelly

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Lionsgate UK

US, present day. When his grandmother passes away, strait-laced corporate lawyer Jason Kelly is enlisted to drive his ex-Green Beret grandfather Dick to his Florida retreat. Although his own wedding to his boss's controlling daughter Meredith is only a week away, Jason reluctantly agrees. However, Dick tricks Jason into taking him to Daytona Beach, where spring-break festivities are in full swing. Though Jason was close to his grandfather as a boy, they're now largely estranged and he's horrified by Dick's shameless behaviour, particularly his foul-mouthed flirting and attempts to bed equally outrageous college student Lenore. As Jason becomes increasingly embroiled in his grandfather's antics – inadvertently taking crack at a frat party, getting into bar fights and repeated stints in jail – he begins to develop feelings for Lenore's friend, his former photography classmate Shadia. Dick reveals his true mission: to sabotage Jason's loveless upcoming marriage and unfulfilling career plans and reawaken his creative ambitions. Shadia flees when she finds out about Jason's imminent wedding, and a furious Jason returns home to Meredith. Dick follows, hatching a plan to encourage Jason to break off the wedding, which he ultimately does in front of all the guests. He and Dick race to track down Shadia before she joins an island commune.

Some time later, Dick and Lenore visit Jason with their new baby.

Dragon Blade

Hong Kong/People's Republic of China/USA 2015
Director: Daniel Lee
Certificate 15 103m 24s

Reviewed by Roger Clarke

A Chinese-funded historical spectacular written and directed by Hong Kong filmmaker Daniel Lee, *Dragon Blade* is the story of a disgraced Silk Road soldier (Jackie Chan) who is sent into exile on the northern border of China, where he finds himself embroiled in a family feud over the future of Imperial Rome. John Cusack is the noble Roman general who has defected with some troops and is guarding a young child, Publius, younger brother of the usurper Tiberius and a threat to his power. Playing Tiberius, Adrien Brody schemes, tortures and kills his way through every situation – and ends up chewing the desert scenery without harm to his dentition. Probably this film's main interest is an industry one – it's the latest in a slowly improving big-budget Chinese model selling a Chinese worldview and using Hollywood actors.

It's a clunky film that doesn't really know where its heart lies. Should it be promoting Hollywood social liberalism or Chinese hard power? It ends up doing both. In the end, good-hearted Chinese jingoism not only unites the country's own warring border peoples (the Muslim Uighurs, who are a touchy subject in China right now, are sensitively depicted) against an evil western foe, but sorts out the foreign powers too. Anyone in the west who is unfamiliar with the long reach of Chinese history may have forgotten that those Chinese historical movies they love are set at the same time as the Roman Empire: here is a gladiatorial reminder.

There's a lot of attention to detail in the film's design, with Lee taking personal control of this side of production, and cinematographer Tony Cheung composes plenty of striking desert vistas and absorbing panoramas. The editing is brisk, the soundtrack a combination of sentimental occasional music familiar in Asian cinema and the chimes of martial ardour. Where CGI is used, it's not state-of-the-art. Brody and Cusack have the slight air of doing a Japanese whisky advert that they hope no one will see back home.



Roman holiday: Jackie Chan

The script is terrible, full of caricatures and cod philosophy, with no credible female roles. There's a bat-squeak of *Game of Thrones* about the unfolding narrative, especially in Brody's snarling viciousness, the dispatch of boy kings and the whole theme of defending border walls and uniting previously warring factions against a common enemy. Chan is essentially Jon Snow. The wonder is that there are no dragons.

Chan, now 61 and still playing young for his age, brings a wealth of experience to the film. He's more energised here than in recent roles, and appears to be working hard to make this movie deliver. The dialogue is almost designed to please the Chinese government: "You're trained to kill, we're trained to keep peace," Chan says to Cusack, with an air of complete innocence. This is a truly Chinese position – a staunch belief in the Chinese people's own good-heartedness, which just happens to be yoked to state interest.

This is a fun, immensely flawed movie, which will be looked back on as a turning-point when big Hollywood stars got upgraded in Chinese films. Nevertheless, the Chinese film that is as successful in the west as it is in China isn't here yet, with the gulf between post-Maoist command-economy morals and Californian optimism yet to be bridged in a coherent and pleasing manner. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Jackie Chan
Susanna Tsang
Written by
Daniel Lee
Screenplay
Tony Cheung
Nicky Shih
Director of Photography
Tony Cheung
Edited by
Yau Chi-Wai
Production Design
Daniel Lee
Thomas Chong
Original Music
Henry Lai
Sound Designers
Phyllis Cheng
Steve Burgess

Costume Designer
Thomas Chong
Action Director
Jackie Chan
Action Choreographers
He Jun
JC Stunt Team

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Production Companies
A Visualizer production in

collaboration with Fable House
Presented by Sparkle Roll Media Corporation, Huayi Brothers Media Corporation, Shanghai Film Group Co. Ltd, Sparkle Roll Culture & Entertainment Development Ltd
In association with Home Media and Entertainment Fund, Shenzhen Tencent Video Culture Communication Ltd, China Film & TV Capital, Alibaba (China) Co. Ltd,

Yu Le Bao
A Daniel Lee film
Supervised by China Film Co-production Corporation
Executive Producers
Jackie Chan
Wang Zhongjun
Ren Zhonglun
Zhou Maofei
Joe Tam
Wang Zhonglei
Rojer Zhu
Zhao Lei
Patrick Liu

Cast
Jackie Chan
Huo An
John Cusack

Lucius
Adrien Brody
Tiberius
Lin Peng
Cold Moon
Mika Wang
Xiu Qing
Siwon Choi
Yin Po
Xiao Yang
Captain
Wang Taili
Rat
Sammy Hung
Red Sun
Steve Yoo
Cougar
Lorie Pester
Parthian Queen
William Feng
General Huo Qubing

Sharni Vinson
Lady Crassus
Jozef Liu Waite
Publius

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Part-subtitled

Distributor
Signature
Entertainment

Hong Kongese
theatrical title
Tian jiang xiong shi

China, 48 BC. Huo An is a Han dynasty soldier who keeps the peace on the Silk Road, the ancient trading route of the Far East. He is committed to ideals of racial and cultural harmony. When he and his fellow 'Protection Squad' soldiers are arrested on smuggling charges, they are sentenced to hard labour, repairing the ruined frontier town of Wild Goose Gate. A defecting Roman legion under the command of

Lucius arrives; the Romans' engineering skills allow Huo An and his men to finish their construction work in only 15 days. However, travelling with Lucius is Publius, the young brother of evil consul Tiberius; soon, Tiberius and his troops are marching on China to deal with this threat to Tiberius's power.

After many acts of cruelty and treachery, Huo An kills Tiberius.

The 5th Wave

USA 2016
Director: J Blakeson
Certificate 15 112m 17s

Reviewed by Vadim Rizov

The *Twilight* and *Hunger Games* franchises have concluded, but the quest to find the next comparably successful adaptation of a YA series continues. At the time of going to press, it's not known whether *The 5th Wave* will be similarly profitable, more of a bantamweight – like the successful-enough *The Maze Runner* films – or a non-starter à la *I Am Number Four* and *The Mortal Instruments*. Rick Yancey's source novel is the first of three (the third is forthcoming), so a film franchise is doable if audiences bite.

The basic plot elements are predictably familiar: just like Katniss Everdeen, seemingly ordinary Cassie (Chloë Grace Moretz) must discover her latent gifts to help save humanity. As in *Twilight*, the seeds of a love triangle are also planted, as Cassie redirects her affections from high-school crush Ben (Nick Robinson) to hunky Evan (Alex Roe, more or less fitting the novel's description of his character as "a teenage version of the Brawny paper towel guy"). Aliens are the enemy but – as in *The Hunger Games* and *The Maze Runner* – in this dystopian future it's wise not to trust any adult authority figures either, especially those from the military.

The alien invasion arrives with commendable swiftness, and soon there are disaster-porn scenes of CGI waves wiping out entire cities. The genocidal aliens ('Others') kill off humanity's electric power with an electromagnetic pulse in the 'first wave', unleash tsunami waves in the second, a heightened version of the avian flu in the third, and disguise themselves as humans in the fourth. The fears on display here – a survivalist's worst nightmare, succeeded by ecological fears and health concerns – are diversely topical.

Cassie describes herself as a "normal high-school girl" (her age bumped up from the novel's 12). Much of *The 5th Wave* is split between her story, as she strives to rescue younger brother Sammy from military custody, and Ben, who – like all children surviving the pandemic – has been drafted by the military to combat the



Gross encounters: Chloë Grace Moretz

aliens. The plot twists are pro forma; pre-teen viewers may not be familiar with him yet, but adults know that Liev Schreiber is one of those actors whose appearance portends nothing good. The fresh elements are the introduction of aliens into a YA context and a mildly feminist stance (most notably via Maika Monroe's soldier Ringer, who yells at teen boys not to stare at her ass and throat-punches a guy when he asks her to play strip poker).

British director J. Blakeson (making his Hollywood debut after 2009's *The Disappearance of Alice Creed*) adeptly pushes the tempo and – with DP Enrique Chediak, himself fresh off *The Maze Runner* – keeps the widescreen framing adroitly slick. The romance is ham-handed, the dialogue cliché-ridden and the action sequences entirely lacking in exciting shootouts or general tenseness. There is much plugging of Sony products, as is now routinely the case in movies produced by studios owned by the conglomerate: not just close-ups of their smartphones but also a poster for catalogue title *Big Fish* in Evan's room. The one surprising moment is a non-CGI, good old-fashioned gasoline explosion that blows up a bus. The filming of this scene, in downtown Macon, Georgia, blew a fireball in unexpected directions, causing considerable damage to shopfronts in the area – surely the only unplanned element of this film. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Tobey Maguire
Graham King
Matthew Plouffe
Lynn Harris
Screenplay
Susannah Grant
Akiva Goldsman
Jeff Pinkner
Based on the novel
by Rick Yancey
Director of
Photography
Enrique Chediak
Editor
Paul Rubell

Production Designer
Jon Billington
Music
Henry Jackman
Production Mixer
Ed White
Costume Designer
Sharen Davis
Visual Effects
Scanline VFX
Spin
Mammal Studios
Shade VFX
Clearcut FX
Method Studios
The Embassy

Pixomondo
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LSC Film Corporation
Production
Companies
Columbia Pictures
presents in
association with LStar
Capital a MATERIAL/
GK Films production
This project was
completed with
assistance from
the Georgia Film,

Music & Digital
Entertainment Office
Executive Producers
Denis O'Sullivan
Richard Middleton
Ben Waisbren
Cast
Chloë Grace Moretz
Cassie Sullivan
Nick Robinson
Ben Parish, 'Zombie'
Ron Livingston
Oliver Sullivan
Maggie Siff

Lisa Sullivan
Alex Roe
Evan Walker
Maria Bello
Sergeant Reznik
Maika Monroe
Ringer
Zackary Arthur
Sam Sullivan,
'Sammy'
Liev Schreiber
Colonel Vosch
Tony Revolori
Dumbo
Talitha Bateman
Teacup

Nadji Jeter
Poundcake
Alex MacNicoll
Flintstone

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Studiocanal Limited

Present day. An alien ship unleashes an attack on Earth, devastating most of the planet. When her mother is killed, high-school student Cassie Sullivan, her father Oliver and younger brother Sammy leave their Ohio home and find a refugee camp. Soldiers arrive, led by Commander Vosch, and take the children to a military base for training. All the adults are killed and Cassie flees. Meanwhile Cassie's high-school crush Ben Parish is trained to kill the aliens, who are now disguising themselves as humans. After

being shot on the way to rescue her brother, Cassie is nursed back to health by Evan Walker. They trek to the military base, sharing a night of passion en route. Cassie learns that Evan is half human, half 'Other' (as the aliens are called). Ben realises that the military leaders are themselves Others, and are training the children to kill the remaining humans. Cassie rescues Sammy with Ben and Evan's help, and they flee as the latter blows up the base. A small group of children band together, vowing to defeat the Others.

The Forest

USA/United Kingdom 2015
Director: Jason Zada
Certificate 15 93m 10s

Reviewed by Adam Nayman

There have been a lot of very effective chillers about identical twins: Brian De Palma's *Sisters* (1973) comes to mind, plus David Cronenberg's *Dead Ringers* (1988) and Arthur Penn's underrated *Dead of Winter* (1987). Jason Zada's *The Forest* won't get added to that list any time soon, though its screenplay does cleverly exploit the superstition that some siblings feel supernaturally simpatico with one another. After learning that her sister Jess has disappeared into Japan's Aokigahara forest – notorious as a destination for people looking to commit suicide – Sara (Natalie Dormer) refuses to believe the worst. Her reasoning is that if Jess were dead, she'd feel it.

The contradiction of a young woman who believes in twin telepathy yet refuses to heed the locals' warnings that the forest is filled with evil spirits could be the jumping-off point for a thorny, original horror movie. Sadly, Zada – an ad-industry whiz making his feature debut – doesn't seem to have his heart in the material. *The Forest* is as perfunctory as mainstream genre moviemaking gets. When Sara arrives in Tokyo and a homeless man inexplicably throws himself against the window of her taxi, it's the most pandering sort of jump scare. Later, when she starts having dreamy visions of Jess as a creepy young child, the imagery is imitative of *Insidious*, *Sinister* and other recent genre hits.

Things perk up slightly when Sara meets an Australian journalist (Taylor Kinney) who is also visiting Aokigahara. His seductive, vaguely untrustworthy mien adds an air of ambiguity to the proceedings; because we know Sara is married, their flirtation feels illicit, and is all the more invigorating for it. There's also a genuinely effective bit of exposition where Sara tells her new friend about the death of her parents, and we see what



A stalk in the woods: Natalie Dormer

really happened versus her strategically sanitised recollection of events. It's a hint that our heroine has a capacity for calculated self-delusion as well as a guilty conscience.

It's not just the character who's hiding something, however. Once the duo head into the sea of trees with a Japanese guide (who of course makes a speech about how the woods are haunted) and the pieces of the plot click into place, *The Forest* reveals itself as not only a derivative horror movie but also an exercise in thoroughly dishonest storytelling. There's a difference between deft misdirection (*à la*, let's say, *The Sixth Sense*) and outright obfuscation. If Zada recognises it, he doesn't seem to care. Ultimately, the problem is not that the film doesn't play fair with its audience: its major failure is not being scary (or even passably creepy) despite its intriguing set-up and atmospheric location. But it's still pretty irritating when a movie shows its hand after 90 minutes of huffing, puffing and bluffing and it isn't holding a darn thing. ☹

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Tory Metzger David S. Goyer David Linde	Companies Al Film presents a Lava Bear, Phantom Four Films production	In Colour [1.85:1]
Written by Ben Ketai	Executive Producers Len Blavatnik Aviv Giladi Lawrence Bender Andrew Pfeffer	Distributor Icon Film Distribution
Director of Photography Mattias Trolstrup	Cast Natalie Dormer Sara/Jess Price Taylor Kinney Aiden Yukiyoshi Ozawa Michi Eoin Macken Rob Stephanie Vogt Valerie	
Edited by Jim Flynn	Dolby Digital	
Production Designer Kevin Phipps		
Music Bear McCreary		
Production Sound Mixer Stanomir Dragos		
Costume Designer Bojana Nikitovic		
©Forest Bear, LLC Production		

US, the present. Sara learns that her identical twin sister Jess has disappeared while teaching at a high school in Japan; she calls her on her cell phone but gets no answer. Sara decides to fly to Japan to look for Jess and is surprised to find out that she was last seen entering Aokigahara forest, at the base of Mount Fuji. The locals tell her that Aokigahara is the chosen destination for people looking to commit suicide, and that the spirits there prey on sad people. Sara meets Australian journalist Aiden, who says he's going into the forest to write a story and would like to accompany her. The next day, they set out with a guide and find Jess's tent at dusk. The guide says they must leave before nightfall, but Sara insists on staying and Aiden decides to spend the night there as well. Sara sees a young girl who warns her not to trust Aiden, and later she thinks she sees photos of Jess on Aiden's phone. She runs away and is nearly killed when she falls into a pit, where she has terrifying visions. Aiden rescues her and takes her to an abandoned radio station, where Sara believes she hears Jess talking to her from behind a door. But this is another hallucination brought on by the forest spirits. Confused, Sara murders Aiden. She slashes her wrists while experiencing another hallucination, this one about the night her parents died. It transpires that Jess is alive; she escapes from the forest, only to realise instinctively that Sara has become the latest victim of the suicide forest.

Freeheld

USA/United Kingdom 2015
Director: Peter Sollett
Certificate 12A 103m 23s

Reviewed by Kate Stables

The tenacious fight that dying detective Laurel Hester put up in 2005, to have her police pension granted to her domestic partner Stacie Andree, became a famous strand in the US marriage equality campaign. To emphasise how far gay rights have come, director Peter Sollett's well-intentioned but disappointingly formulaic dramatisation of Hester's struggle for justice points out repeatedly how closeted his heroine had to be in a small-town New Jersey detective squad, even in the early noughties. Dating outside the county limits, passing off her lover as her roommate and lying to her cop partner Dane, Julianne Moore's taciturn Hester keeps control at all costs. "Being afraid and hiding is a horrible way to live," she opines to a drug-ring witness she's cultivating, in one of the script's creakier insights.

Screenwriter Ron Nyswaner treads very respectfully indeed in his characterisation of Hester and Andree (an understated Ellen Page) and their low-profile partnership. To balance out the drama prior to the diagnosis of Hester's terminal cancer, he majors on their love affair in the film's front end, but presents it as a cookie-cutter perfect union. Wound around it is a sketchy drugs-bust thread that underlines Hester's devotion to her job, rather than the thriller-type suspense it aims for. Michael Shannon, bringing a tough, laconic decency as Dane, who is struggling with his own affection for Hester, introduces some much needed nuance here. That nuance is otherwise absent, however, from this broad-strokes morality tale, in which the Ocean County Board of Chosen Freeholders – a quintet of elected male county administrators who repeatedly refuse to grant Hester's earned pension to Andree – are painted as smug conservatives preserving small-town bigotry. Positioning Josh Charles's Bryan Kelder as the principled newcomer on the Freeholders board, reluctant to pit himself against Four Angry Men, feels stage-managed rather than injecting a useful note of tension.

Like 2014's *Still Alice*, for which Moore won an Oscar, *Freeheld* depends heavily on her unrivalled



Michael Shannon, Julianne Moore, Ellen Page

ability to shape a moving portrait of a woman in crisis. Continuing her long reign as the multiplex's Our Lady of the Sorrows, she gives a sharp, nerve-scraped performance, which emphasises Hester's doggedness in pursuit of justice as both cop and life partner. Less fortunate is Page, whose thin, stand-by-your-woman characterisation gives her little to work with. Only watching her *willing* each breath in and out, as she listens to Hester's ragged night-time breathing as the cancer worsens, reminds you sharply how good she can be. By contrast, Steve Carell's portrayal of Steve Goldstein, the bouncy gay activist who brings the 'shock and awe' of a media circus to Hester's race-against-time pension appeal, feels stereotyped and theatrical.

You can catch the real-life Hester (even more extrovert, ironically) in Cynthia Wade's short, taut 2007 Oscar-winning documentary – also titled *Freeheld* – which closely tracks the last ten weeks of Hester's battle. As with last year's *The Walk*, which dramatised the events of the 2008 film *Man on Wire*, Sollett's *Freeheld* strains hard to translate the already deftly documented story of an extraordinary human struggle into a drama that will bring it to the attention of a far wider audience. But in its eagerness to provide Hester with a fitting commemoration via sentimental sequences and earnest speechifying ("What's political about a cop getting screwed out of a fair pension?"), *Freeheld* winds up as much televisual tearjerker as worthy memorial. ☹

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Michael Sharnberg Stacey Sher Cynthia Wade Jack Selby Duncan Montgomery James D. Stern Julie Goldstein Phil Hunt Compton Ross Kelly Bush Ellen Page	Sound Mixer Ken Ishii Costume Designer Stacey Battat	Adam Del Deo Scott G. Stone Hilary Davis Stephen Kelliher Greg Schenz
Screenplay Ron Nyswaner Based on the documentary short film <i>Freeheld</i> by Cynthia Wade	Production Companies Summit Entertainment presents in association with Bankside Films and Endgame Entertainment, Head Gear Films and Metrol Technology A Masproduction/ Shiny Penny/ Lieutenant Films production A High Frequency Entertainment production	Cast Julianne Moore Laurel Hester Ellen Page Stacie Andree Michael Shannon Dane Wells Steve Carell Steven Goldstein, 'Steve' Luke Grimes Todd Belkin Josh Charles Bryan Kelder
Director of Photography Maryse Alberti Editor Andrew Mondshein Production Designer Jane Musky Music Hans Zimmer Johnny Marr	Executive Producers Robert Salerno Richard Fischhoff Ameet Shukla Taylor Latham	Dolby Digital In Colour [1.85:1] Distributor EI Films

New Jersey, 2002. Detective Laurel Hester receives a citation for a drugs bust. She is asked out by much younger mechanic Stacie, and starts dating her. Laurel is closeted at work, and from her police partner Dane, to Stacie's annoyance. A year later, Laurel and Stacie buy a house together, and soon register a newly introduced Domestic Partnership. Laurel is diagnosed with lung cancer. Her application to the Ocean County board of freeholders (county administrators) to grant her pension to Stacie is denied. Dane persuades her to address a council meeting, where the freeholders refuse again. Local gay activist Steve Goldstein organises a protest campaign. Laurel's fellow detectives won't back her. Stacie is harassed by local bigots. Gay activists boycott Ocean County. The cancer spreads to Laurel's brain. Sympathetic freeholder Bryan Kelder can't shift a colleague's religious objection to Laurel's case. The media clamour grows. Dane learns that the counsellors can claim multiple pensions. The state governor urges the freeholders to change their ruling. At a final public meeting, the detective squad arrives to support Laurel. The pension grant is approved. Laurel is promoted to lieutenant. Stacie proposes to a dying Laurel. Laurel is buried with full police honours.

Goodnight Mommy

Directors: Veronika Franz, Severin Fiala

Reviewed by Violet Lucca

Spoiler alert: this review reveals a plot twist
Goodnight Mommy is not so much a horror film as a series of blunt gestures – towards Austria's Nazi past and western society's frequently unfair expectations of motherhood – intended as an unholy affront to a bucolic, homey idyll. Yet these subjects remain empty provocations, functioning only to distract from the fact that this is a deeply boring exercise in genre clichés, dressed up in *haute* European arthouse aesthetics.

The heavy-handedness (and empty-headedness) of the film's formal strategies is apparent from its opening: a clip from 1956's *The Trapp Family*, in which Maria von Trapp holds little Martina while singing Brahms's 'Guten Abend, Gute Nacht'. After this quick reminder, for those who might've forgotten, of what the ideal mother looks like, we're transported to the present day, and to a forest-lined lake somewhere in Lower Austria (the region Hitler's family hailed from, and which had the most Jews pre-WWII), where Lukas and Elias, two blond, blue-eyed twins, float serenely across the surface. When they return to their sterile, ultra-modernist summer home, a stick-thin woman with bandages on her face – her only exposed skin mimicking a Glasgow smile – appears and angrily orders them to wash up.

From here, a pattern is established of the boys' playing happily together in the wilderness each day, a mood destroyed by their gruff, wannabe yummy-mummy's wrath each evening; eventually, they begin to wonder whether she's an imposter. After all, the surgery she's undergone is not only a physical betrayal of motherly identity (as some pre-op photographs glimpsed hanging in a hallway prove, whatever procedure she's recovering from was elective and cosmetic) but also an ideological one: would sweet old mum really dare to think of anyone other than her children?

Rather than heightening suspense or varying the action in some meaningful way, the film's protracted scenes of impish mayhem, always shot in long takes, come off as tedious and indulgent, an opportunity to demonstrate how exquisitely co-directors Severin Fiala and Veronika Franz can compose a shot or make another sly reference



It's a wrap: Susanne Wuest

to the boys' Nazi tendencies. (When the mother finds a lighter in Elias's bunk bed, he tells her it's for burning books.) Where the filmmakers' austere, leering approach – a bad imitation of producer Ulrich Seidl's style – really falls apart is when we finally learn the big twist: Lukas is actually dead, and Elias has been imagining his presence the whole time. Little clues about this completely lame reveal – which initially come off as just more of mommy's cruelty – have been peppered throughout. But there are a few moments in the film that logically could not be from Elias's perspective, the most glaring being an exchange between the mother and a priest who's returned the 'twins' after they've made a break for it, when she says how difficult things have been since "the accident".

The more enlightening twist is that we haven't been dealing with an unreliable and deranged child narrator but one who exists outside the story and who's committed to methodically cranking up winking sadism. When the brothers kick off their campaign of interrogation and torture, binding mum to the bed and (among other tactics) burning her unbandaged face with a magnifying glass like an insect, one isn't disgusted by witnessing what a child could do to their parent but rather by what lazy filmmakers will deploy to get a cheap rise out of their audience. **S**

The Green Inferno

USA/Chile/United Kingdom 2013

Director: Eli Roth

Certificate 18 100m 22s

Reviewed by Violet Lucca

It's a sad state of affairs when Eli Roth, the director whose work prompted the term 'torture porn', makes a tribute to 80s Italian cannibal horror using unimaginative gore. This lack of imagination is even tougher to stomach when the plot's structure is an extended version of the 'make the audience wait for it' trick.

Originally shot in late 2012 in New York, Chile and Peru (20 minutes further downstream the Huallaga River than Werner Herzog went to shoot *Aguirre*, solely for bragging rights), *The Green Inferno* (named after the film in Ruggero Deodato's *Cannibal Holocaust*) features a zeitgeisty topic that's more relevant than ever: insincere college slacktivists and social justice warriors who are more concerned with marketing themselves than with changing the world.

Following the *Hostel* model, Roth goes out of his way to make these self-absorbed characters as stereotypical and unlikeable as possible, so that when the flesh-chomping finally begins, you're supposed to be cheering. Justine (Lorenza Izzo) is initially scornful of ACT, a student activist organisation on her campus that seemingly takes on every issue under the sun. After hearing a lecture about female genital mutilation, however, Justine gets 'woke', asking her father, a UN lawyer, what can be done (over a very expensive lunch, of course). She attends an ACT meeting after receiving a special invitation from its handsome leader Alejandro, but is cast out for making a wisecrack about a hunger strike. She goes out of her way to get back in with the group – something that feels more like an attempt to fix her bruised ego than to change the world. Alejandro 'allows' her back in, and she takes part in ACT's next big action: flying down to Peru to stop a gas company drilling in an area inhabited by an Amazonian tribe that's had limited interaction with the outside world. The activists are chaining themselves to trees around the site when a private militia member threatens to shoot Justine in the head; the only thing that stops him is the fact that her father works for the UN – the real reason Alejandro wanted her in the group in the first place. On the way back to civilisation after successfully stopping the drilling – and trending on Twitter – the group's plane crashes, and cannibals (played by real Callanayacu tribespeople, painted blood red) scoop up the survivors for dinner. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Ulrich Seidl

Written by

Veronika Franz

Severin Fiala

Director of

Photography

Martin Gschlacht

Editing

Michael Palm

Production Design

Johannes Salat

Hubert Klausner

Music based on

compositions by

Olga Neuwirth

Sound

Klaus Kellermann

Costume Design

Tanja Hausner

Production

Company

Ulrich Seidl Film

Cast

Susanne Wuest

mother

Lukas Schwarz

Lukas

Elias Schwarz

Elias

Hans Escher

priest

Elfriede Schatz

Karl Purker

Red Cross charity

collectors

Georg Delivsky

pizza man

Christian Steindl

sacristan

Christian Schatz

farmer

Erwin Schmalzbauer

accordion player

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Vertigo Releasing

Austrian

theatrical title

Ich seh, Ich seh

Lower Austria, present day. Twins Lukas and Elias play on the lake near their summer home. When they return, their mother, whose face is covered in bandages, pours a drink only for Elias. She becomes cross and tells the boys that she needs to rest after her surgery. The brothers talk about how she is acting differently, and suspect that she's not their mother. A man delivers a year's worth of pepperoni pizzas, even though neither of the boys likes it. The boys find a sick cat in an underground ossuary and bring it home. The cat dies and they put it into an aquarium. Mother beats Elias. The brothers flee to a church but the priest brings them back. The boys tie Mother to her bed; they also gag her, and so she is unable to cry out for help when two Red Cross volunteers come to the house looking for donations. Mother reveals that Lukas is dead – the boy we have seen is a figment of Elias's imagination. Elias sets light to the curtains, and the house is engulfed in flames.

Elias and Lukas walk out of a cornfield into a clearing, and their mother, pre-surgery, joins them.



Unleash the feast: Ignacia Allamand, Ariel Levy

While the elaborate protest provides the set-up for people-eating (and is yet another reminder of the group's economic privilege), it also turns the film's 'message' away from single-click, consequence-free online activism to hands-on, Peace Corps-style intervention. Muddling these things together, Roth fails to make a substantive or funny critique of either. Instead, the ACT members are subjected to a laundry list of predictable ironic punishments: the 'nice guy' who has a crush on Justine gets horribly mutilated and eaten first; the vegan girl slits her throat after accidentally eating her friend; Justine is prepared by the head priestess for ritual female circumcision. (One wonders what these natives do when there aren't half a dozen outsiders to feast upon.) The handheld camerawork in this section of the film does inject some life into the otherwise unremarkable and sometimes amateurish overall style. Despite such sloppiness in both storytelling and filmmaking, Roth sets up a possible sequel. One hopes its delay will be indefinite. **C**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Eli Roth Miguel Asensio Llamas Nicolás López Christopher Woodrow Molly Connors	Production Companies Worldview Entertainment & Exclusive Media present A Dragonfly Entertainment/ Sobras International Pictures Production	Daniel Aaron Burns Jonah Ignacia Allamand Kara Ramon Liao bald headhunter Richard Burgi Charles
Story Eli Roth	Executive Producers Maria Cestone Sarah Johnson Redlich Hoyt David Morgan	Dolby Digital In Colour [1.85:1]
Screenplay Eli Roth Guillermo Amoedo	Director of Photography Antonio Quercia	Distributor El Films
Edited by Ernesto Diaz	Cast Lorenza Izzo Justine Ariel Levy Alejandro Daryl Sabara Lars Kirby Bliss Blanton Amy Sky Ferreira Kaycee Magda Apanowicz Samantha Nicolás Martínez	
Production Design Marichi Palacios		
Music Manuel Riveiro		
Sound Mixer Mauricio Molina		
Costume Design Elisa Hormazábal		
©Worldview Entertainment Capital LLC & Dragonfly Entertainment Inc.		

Columbia University, New York, present day. A protest by action group ACT wakes student Justine one Sunday morning. One of Justine's classmates invites her to come along to an ACT meeting because its handsome leader, Alejandro, has been asking about her. Justine joins ACT and flies to Peru with other members of the group to stage a demonstration against a gas company drilling on an Amazonian tribe's land. The protest generates enough media attention to stop the project. The group leave for home, but their plane crashes in the jungle, killing several ACT members immediately; natives capture the survivors and start eating them one by one. Alejandro explains that their protest was part of a deal with a rival gas company to get ACT publicity. The natives are about to begin a ritual circumcision on Justine when a young boy frees her. She runs into a clearing, where the new gas company's private troops are shooting the natives. She is taken via helicopter back to New York, where she claims that all the other ACT protesters died in the crash and that the natives saved her life. She gets a call from Alejandro's sister saying that she has found a satellite photograph proving he's still alive.

Hitchcock Truffaut

France/USA 2015
Director: Kent Jones



Peer window: François Truffaut, Alfred Hitchcock

See Feature on page 36

Reviewed by Richard Combs

A line of French text is briefly highlighted at the beginning of this film about the making of a book. It asserts that if cinema suddenly became silent again and many of its directors were condemned to unemployment, among those who would escape would be Alfred Hitchcock, whom everyone would finally understand to be the best director in the world. This seems to come from François Truffaut's opening letter to Hitchcock, proposing they collaborate on an interview book which would go through the latter's films one by one and would establish that this mere entertainer, 'the master of suspense', had evolved the most complete understanding of the visual language of cinema. It was a bold claim for 1962, one that would have been laughed at by Anglo-Saxon critics of the day, though of course that critical wheel has

now revolved sufficiently to put Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) at the top of the last *Sight & Sound* poll of the all-time greatest films, displacing *Citizen Kane*. Many of the interviewees in Kent Jones and co-writer Serge Toubiana's *Hitchcock/Truffaut* maintain that Truffaut's book, first published in 1966, was instrumental in that revolution, though his methods, concentrating on visual minutiae, sprang from the kind of analysis which he and others had developed in the pages of *Cahiers du cinéma* and which had also come in for their share of ridicule. "*Cahiers* once devoted 14 pages to a thematic index of objects in Hitchcock's films: glasses, throats, clocks... eyes, knives, keys," Richard Roud noted disapprovingly in *Sight & Sound* in the Autumn issue, 1960. By 2005, that method had become so general that an English critic, Michael Walker, could publish a whole book devoted to *Hitchcock's Motifs*.

The devil of interpretation, and stylistic challenge, was certainly in such detail, and

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by Charles S. Cohen Olivier Miller Written by Kent Jones Serge Toubiana Directors of Photography Mihai Malaimare Jr Daniel Cowen Nicholas Bentgen Lisa Rinzier Eric Gautier Genta Tamaki Edited by Rachel Reichman Original Music Composed by Jeremiah Bornfield Re-recording Mixer Matthieu Cochin	©Artline Films, Cohen Media Group, Arte France Production Companies Cohen Media Group, Artline Films, Arte France present Coprodded by Artline Films, Cohen Media Group, Arte France With the participation of La Cinémathèque française, Ciné+, Centre national de la cinématographie, Prociép - société des producteurs, Angoia Film Extracts <i>Vertigo</i> (1958) <i>Sabotage</i> (1936)	<i>Marnie</i> (1964) <i>Psycho</i> (1960) <i>The Man Who Knew Too Much</i> (1955) <i>Blackmail</i> (1929) <i>Torn Curtain</i> (1966) <i>The Lodger A Story of the London Fog</i> (1926) <i>Champagne</i> (1928) <i>Number Seventeen</i> (1932) <i>The Manxman</i> (1929) <i>The Man Who Knew Too Much</i> (1934) <i>Strangers on a Train</i> (1951) <i>Rear Window</i> (1954) <i>To Catch a Thief</i> (1954) <i>Les Quatre Cents</i>	<i>Coups</i> (1959) <i>Jamaica Inn</i> (1939) <i>North by Northwest</i> (1959) <i>The Birds</i> (1963) <i>Saboteur</i> (1942) <i>Jules et Jim</i> (1962) <i>Family Plot</i> (1976) <i>The Paradine Case</i> (1947) <i>Suspicion</i> (1941) <i>Notorious</i> (1946) <i>I Confess</i> (1953) <i>Let There Be Light</i> (1948) <i>Foreign Correspondent</i> (1940) <i>Topaz</i> (1969) <i>The 39 Steps</i> (1935) <i>Young and</i>	<i>Innocent</i> (1937) <i>The Wrong Man</i> (1956) <i>Rope</i> (1948) <i>Spellbound</i> (1945) <i>Easy Virtue</i> (1927) <i>Murder!</i> (1930) <i>Frenzy</i> (1972) <i>The Fast and the Furious</i> (2001) <i>La Sonata à Kreutzer</i> (1956) <i>Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde</i> (1920)	Olivier Assayas Peter Bogdanovich Martin Scorsese Kiyoshi Kurosawa Arnold Desplechin Richard Linklater narrated by Bob Balaban In Colour [1.78:1] Part-subtitled Distributor Dogwoof Publicity title Hitchcock/Truffaut
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In 1962, François Truffaut spent eight days interviewing Alfred Hitchcock at Universal Studios, with translator Helen Scott and photographer Philippe Halsman. Truffaut set out to prove that Hitchcock was no mere entertainer but an artist with a sure understanding of film's visual language and how it could elicit an audience response. The resulting book (first published in 1966) is examined in this documentary, and excerpts from the interview tapes (in English and French) are heard.

Ten contemporary filmmakers are also interviewed about the book's impact on their conception of film. David Fincher and Richard Linklater talk about Hitchcock's playing with the timing of shots. Olivier

Assayas comments that Truffaut learnt concision and speed in his own films from Hitchcock, and that the book is actually part of his film work.

In connection with 1956's *The Wrong Man*, Truffaut asks Hitchcock what he thinks of being called a Catholic artist, and Hitchcock asks to go off the record. Although he apparently always worried about whether he really was an artist, Hitchcock expresses satisfaction that he achieved a "mass emotion... it was pure film" with 1960's *Psycho*. The two men continued their relationship beyond the book, commenting on each other's films. Truffaut, half Hitchcock's age in 1962, died only four years after him.

Ip Man 3

Hong Kong/USA 2015
Director: Yip Wai Shun
Certificate 12A 105m 6s

Reviewed by Roger Clarke

Since Donnie Yen's Ip franchise took a five-year vacation, the martial-arts genre has been populated with rivals peddling the same enhanced biography – most importantly Wong Kar-wai's *The Grandmaster* (2013) but also *The Legend Is Born: Ip Man* (2010) and *Ip Man: The Final Fight* (2013). The real-life Ip Man (1893-1972) was best known as the trainer of Bruce Lee, and he is currently being furiously developed as a kind of Hong Kong 'state' hero who stood up to the brutal invading Japanese and the apparently corrupt colonial British. Yen plays him as an almost saintly figure in this film: dressed like a priest, the essence of calm and moderation against the impetuosity and crookedness of the modern age.

Ip would in reality have been in his sixties when this action takes place, and there's a great deal of licence taken by the script – we begin with a strange, playful sparring match with a young and narcissistic Bruce Lee, when in fact he would already have left for America at this point. Authenticity shouldn't necessarily matter, but the trouble is that there are no vivid broad strokes here to replace the little tugs on reality that historical veracity brings to a narrative.

In the first 2008 instalment of this franchise, Ip Man fought the occupying Japanese; in the second the British; and here in the third it is the Americans in the form of Mike Tyson as a



The old virtuosity shop: Donnie Yen

corrupt businessman intent on destroying a school so that he can develop it. There are hordes of henchmen ready to do battle when Ip defends the school, standing on guard duty for long hours to the detriment of his marriage. One such scene is bearable, but by the second the idea is outstaying its welcome, as streams of villains fall about like skittles in a bowling alley. The fight scenes, brightly lit and no longer choreographed by the magisterial Sammo Hung (Yuen Wo Ping takes over), are mostly pedestrian. The best is probably when Ip Man is attacked in a lift by a Thai villain: it's restricted and inventive and seems to combine all the themes of the movie. The final 'who represents Wing Chun' showdown strengthens the contention that it is really Zhang Jin as Ip's antagonist Cheung Tin-chi (confusingly, Zhang is also in Wai's Ip-rival *The Grandmaster*) who walks off with the film, and not Yen at all.

A nasty fight with Tyson's character boasts the only taste of real danger in the entire film. With his face tattoos and slumberous, shuffling manner, Tyson resembles an angry wardrobe polished to a sheen with testosterone, trying to swat a hummingbird with its doors. Elsewhere, marginal figures are sketchy, Ip's sickly wife a mere cipher, the dodgy British policeman a cartoon. The prevailing music is sweet as a bowl of red-bean soup over-sugared for children.

Less nationalistic than the previous episodes, the film is still produced and edited in a way that suggests a Hong Kong culture talking to itself rather than to an expected international audience; there's nothing wrong with that, of course, but you should be aware that this movie conforms much more to the sentimental conventions of mainstream Chinese cinema than anything the west is likely to produce. There's absolutely nothing here for people who aren't genre fans, and genre completists will probably feel that yet again we have another trilogy that has run out of steam. There's little to show for director Yip Wai Shun's five years away, and those expecting a triumphant and well-considered return will instead find something tired, undeveloped and cynical. Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Raymond Wong
Screenplay
Edmond Wong
Chan Tai Lee
Jill Leung Lai Yin
Director of Photography
Tse Chung To
Edited by
Cheung Ka Fai
Production Designer
Mak Kwok Keung
Original Music/Keyboards & Percussion
Kenji Kawai
Sound Mixer
Wang Zhe
Costume Designer
Lee Pik Kwan
Action Director
Yuen Wo Ping
Stunt Co-ordinator
Alfred Hsing

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Kong) Ltd
Production Companies
Well Go USA presents
Pegasus Motion Pictures (Hong Kong) Ltd., My Pictures Studio, Dreams Salon Entertainment Culture Ltd., Starbright Communications Limited
Presented by Edmond Wong, Xiu Xiao Yong, Pal Lai, Alan Lee

Cast
Donnie Yen
Ip Man
Zhang Jin
Cheung Tin-chi
Lynn Xiong
Cheung Wing-sing
Patrick Tam
Ma King Sang

Mike Tyson
Frank
Karena Ng
Miss Wong
Kent Cheng
Fat Ball
Leung Ka Yan
Mater Tin
Louis Cheng
Chui Lek
Chan Kwok
Kwan Danny
Bruce Lee
Babyjohn Choi

Dolby Surround 5.1
In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Asia Releasing LLC

Hong Kong, 1959. Two young boys fight at school. Their fathers are summoned: one is Wing Chun grandmaster Ip Man, the other lowly rickshaw driver Cheung Tin-chi. Cheung is both jealous and admiring of the famous martial-arts master and has some martial-arts skills of his own – he fights for money in low-rent dives and dreams of setting up his own teaching facility. Meanwhile the boys' school is threatened by the vicious henchmen of unscrupulous American developer Frank. For a while Cheung joins the villains, but later changes sides. A number of fights ensue, including one between Ip Man and Frank. When Ip Man's wife falls ill with cancer, he fails to turn up to a public challenge and his status seems imperilled. Once his wife has recovered slightly, he returns for a private match with Cheung and defeats him. Cheung is graceful in defeat.

Truffaut's book, which reproduces the editing patterns of many Hitchcock sequences, including the murder by domestic carving knife in *Sabotage* (1936), is an exercise in their unpicking. The present-day interviewees in *Hitchcock/Truffaut* testify to the fascination of these sequences and to the atmosphere that all the object-play might create. "Like in a dream, there is a hyper-perception of objects" (Olivier Assayas); "Hitchcock keeps referring to these fetish objects – keys and handcuffs and ropes and stuff... which have a kind of Freudian weight to them" (Paul Schrader).

Significantly, none of these commentators use terms such as 'surrealism' or 'expressionism' – which they might have had they been critics, and which have certainly been employed freely enough in Hitchcock criticism. But Jones has laid out the stall for his own analytical approach to Hitchcock: "I didn't want experts, historians or critics... What I wanted was to continue the dialogue between the two filmmakers by bringing in ten more filmmakers – people who were into sharing their craft and discussing the issues in the book, discussing Hitchcock and bringing him into the present." According to Martin Scorsese, the impact of Truffaut's interview book was to radicalise his generation of moviemakers; it lifted "a weight off our shoulders" by making them appreciate the artistry and authenticity of a cinema like Hitchcock's, as opposed to the "erudite conversations about the artform" which Schrader characterises as the orthodoxy of the day.

What was surprising to many actual film critics was that there seemed to be little affinity between Truffaut as a filmmaker, revered as a sensitive European humanist, and a manipulator such as Hitchcock, "a theoretician of space" with an "absolutely mechanical sense of construction", according to Assayas. Truffaut's admiration for Hitchcock led him to make films such as *Fahrenheit 451* (1966) and *The Bride Wore Black* (1967), which struck critics as violations of his own nature. In a *Sight & Sound* article (spring 1969) entitled 'Hitchcock versus Truffaut' – the verdict clearly going to the latter – Gavin Millar complained of the interview book: "There is rarely an idea which is unrelated to technical problems of filmmaking or general psychological problems of audience manipulation."

Interestingly, a contemporary filmmaker such as Assayas would seem to fit into that picture of the European humanist, declaring, "I don't like control, I don't like the idea of shooting without transforming the script, without transforming the human aspect." But Assayas then goes on to note: "There is something transcendent in Hitchcock's approach to control. Hitchcock invented a clarity in his cinematographic writing with images that capture the invisible, that reach a form of spirituality."

Perhaps Hitchcock's clarity and "mechanical sense of construction" were not inimical to humanism but could embrace it, or approach it from a different direction. Scorsese talks of an "extraordinary sense of loss" in James Stewart's trailing around San Francisco in bewildered pursuit of Kim Novak in *Vertigo*. Stewart's character is trying to fill a void that "maybe reaches out to everyone... We bring our own sense of melancholy or loss to it." Ⓢ

King Jack

USA/United Kingdom 2015
Director: Felix Thompson

Reviewed by Trevor Johnston

The sun beats down on empty streets and back gardens. Suburban trains trundle by. All is quiet in this small town in the Hudson Valley, yet in teenager Jack's little patch, all hell is breaking loose. First-time writer-director Felix Thompson can lay no claim to discovering the seething, febrile realm of adolescence, unfolding out of sight and earshot of parents and police; what he does with lucid precision, however, is to show how pulse-racing, life-turning moments of crisis emerge from a local nexus of friends, enemies and potential lovers while the rest of the world carries on regardless.

An ongoing confrontation with a bullying older youth, the arrival of a slightly younger cousin for a weekend stay and the puzzlelements of the opposite sex provide the emotional peaks and troughs in Jack's personal narrative, contextualised at key moments by the aforementioned pillow shots of the rust-belt townscape. In itself, an admittedly well-worn stylistic strategy, but it's spot on in its application, giving the story room to breathe while at the same time offsetting its intimate, incredibly accurate portrait of growing up.

Part of that sheer vividness is down to Charlie Plummer's affecting central performance as Jack. He's at the age (14? 15?) when the prospect of sculpted handsomeness is just beginning to take shape, but as yet he's still a weedy kid yearning with every fibre of his being to get older fast. His attempts at nonchalant cool prove disastrously transparent, all of it uncannily rendered by Plummer, who skilfully layers in the ache of morning-to-night anxiety behind the see-through facade of would-be self-possession. There's certainly wry comedy here too, and while Jack is slow on the uptake when it comes to understanding his friend Harriet's affections for him, and stubborn in persisting in a no-win confrontation with the older, evidently damaged



Colossal youth: Charlie Plummer

Shane, the film's considerable emotional pull comes from our investment in the hope that he'll shape up and be the better for it.

That's only intensified by a mid-point confession, exposing an upsetting family history and the favouritism shown towards Jack by his now absent father, which caused his older brother to bully him out of jealousy. Intelligently placed in the dramatic structure, this absolutely illuminates Jack's gnawing hesitancy and indeed his self-destructive need to prove himself in physical confrontation. It's also a key component in Thompson's underlying design, outlining a toxic cycle of domination in young males in which the bullied go on to seek out some weaker victim and the whole process keeps on churning. The bracing violence on display really brings this home, yet the film still allows us to discern the frightened kid even in a snarling aggressor such as Danny Flaherty's cannily drawn Shane. "Works, doesn't it?" he hisses while laying the boot in, a curt phrase stinging in its fierce self-deception, and as such exemplifying the way *King Jack* aligns penetrating insight and economy of means to deliver a modestly proportioned yet potentially memorable coming-of-age saga. **B**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Gabrielle Nadig
Dominic Buchanan

Written by
Felix Thompson

Director of Photography
Brandon Roots

Edited by
Paul Penczner

Production Designer
Emmeline

Wilks-Dupoise

Music Composer
Bryan Senti

Sound Mixer
Alan Kudan

Costume Designer
Jami Villers

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Production Companies

Whitewater

Films presents in

association with

Ropagani and Stink

a Buffalo Picture

House production

Executive producer:

Ropagani

Supported by the

Sundance Institute

Feature Film

Creative Producing

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Film Program Fund
Executive Producers
Rick Rosenthal
Bert Kern
Nick Morton
Daniel Bergmann
Martin Forbes
Robert Herman

Cast

Charlie Plummer
Jack

Cory Nichols
Ben

Christian Madsen
Tom

Danny Flaherty
Shane

Erin Davie
Karen

Yainis Ynoa
Harriet

Scarlet Lizbeth
Robyn

Chloe Levine
Holly

Melvin Mogoli
Beavan

Francis Piscopo
Eric

Elijah Richardson
Malcolm
Tony Divitto
Howard
Robert Nadig
Mr Bodenheimer
Meeko Gattuso
Ray

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Vertigo Films

Small-town New York State, present day. Jack, a mischief-making boy in his early teens, lives with his twentysomething brother Tom and their mother Karen. He is engaged in an ongoing feud with older youth Shane. Attracted to his classmate Robyn, Jack ignores the attentions of his friend Harriet. He is initially unenthusiastic when his 12-year-old cousin Ben comes to stay for the weekend, but the latter's baseball prowess impresses him. Jack and Ben hang out with Harriet and her friend Holly for a game of truth or dare, which reveals that Jack has never been kissed. Harriet kisses him, and Jack realises her affection for him. On their return home, Ben is grabbed by Shane and his friends, and then held captive while they fire paintballs at him. A powerless Jack summons Tom, whose threatening behaviour with a tyre wrench effects a rescue of his now traumatised cousin.

Jack apologises to Ben, confessing that the favouritism of his now absent father (who called him 'King Jack') prompted Tom to bully him for years. Ben ignores Jack, who sneaks off to Robyn's party, where she sexually ensnares him to allow Shane to exact his revenge. A whack from Ben's baseball bat stops Shane briefly, but the other partygoers watch as Shane kicks Jack virtually unconscious. The next day, Jack refuses to report Shane to the police, and is visited by Harriet. At Ben's behest, she has fashioned a paper crown for him, which he wears proudly as he, Ben, Harriet and Holly cycle together in the sunshine.

Mavis!

USA 2015
Director: Jessica Edwards

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

"Mavis gets a little *rough* sometimes," Bob Dylan once said of the young Mavis Staples, according to the woman herself. He was referring to the unexpected grittiness in Staples's singing voice, one of the factors that distinguished her band, The Staple Singers, from the common run of gospel acts. (Dylan also, according to Staples, made frequent appeals for her hand in marriage, but to no avail: "I didn't really have flirtin' on my mind back then.") The Staple Singers were set apart too by the particular tremolo guitar sound favoured by bandleader and patriarch Roebuck 'Pops' Staples, and by their friendship with the Reverend Martin Luther King. The latter affiliation led to a politicisation of their lyrics and an open commitment to the civil rights movement that was then a rarity among gospel performers.

Jessica Edwards's efficient documentary draws on the testimony of friends and associates – including Dylan, who notes that, after hearing the Staples' version of the spiritual 'Sit Down Servant', he "stayed up for a week" – to put the life of Mavis Staples in its musical and political context. Personal content is dealt with less fully, giving the film a somewhat arm's-length feeling; but Staples herself is an irresistibly charming interviewee, and the footage of her singing, both archive and recent, is spine-tingling in its force, grandeur and sheer sense of joy. The degree of love and respect depicted between Staples and the late Pops, meanwhile, challenges the assumption that showbiz families are by necessity riven by dysfunction.

The film details the group's successful merging of a traditional gospel sound with blues, funk and soul influences over the course of the 1970s, and Mavis's subsequent solo career. Sexier content challenged their gospel crowd: "I was waiting for the church folks to come and get me!" says Staples of singing the suggestive 'Let's Do It Again', written by Curtis Mayfield. The band's



True grit: Mavis Staples

Miss Hokusai

Japan 2014-2015
Director: Hara Keiichi
Certificate 12A 89m 40s

Reviewed by Andrew Osmond

In recent years, the Japanese animated features that have reached British cinemas have tended to be Studio Ghibli products or films like them, such as *Wolf Children* (2012) and *Giovanni's Island* (2014). *Miss Hokusai*, though, has its own distinctive flavour, setting mundane adult relationships against a colourful period backdrop. The film takes place in 19th-century Edo (the city that will be renamed Tokyo) and deals with the daily life of the artist O-Ei, daughter of the great Hokusai. A real person, O-Ei left a handful of pictures under her own name; the most famous is *Night Scene in the Yoshiwara* – Yoshiwara being a fabled red-light district. More controversially, some historians speculate that O-Ei created artworks attributed to Hokusai at the end of his life.

The film supports this suggestion, showing father and daughter working practically on top of each other in their pigsty of a workshop ("It gets too dirty, we move"), kneeling on a filthy tatami floor as they create marvels. O-Ei is presented as a striking woman without the usual anime cuteness; her protruding lower lip gives her a pugilistic presence, as does her no-nonsense voice by Watanabe Anne, actor daughter of Watanabe Ken. O-Ei's father, addressed as 'Tetsuzo' (one of several names that Hokusai used), is a dishevelled, unsmiling curmudgeon whose relationship with his daughter seems strictly professional. But this is not especially a father-daughter film. It equally highlights O-Ei's fond relationship with her blind little sister (who 'paints' her own mental pictures of the world) and her awkward, repressed attraction to a handsome rival artist.

The film is very episodic, reflecting the comic on which it's based (*Sarusuberi*, by the late female artist Sugiura Hinako). In particular, some episodes take unexpected turns into the supernatural, including a sequence set in Yoshiwara, where O-Ei and Hokusai see a courtesan with an astral head extruding from her real head like a ghostly white snake. Another vignette involves a Boschian painting of hell that drives a woman insane with its images of devils and skeletons; Hokusai 'exorcises' it by adding an image of the Buddha.



Paint and gain: *Miss Hokusai*

While these scenes are vivid, they digress too far for the film's good, without increasing our understanding of O-Ei. The best character-based scene has O-Ei visiting a brothel to lose her virginity to an androgynous prostitute, only to be terrified by his impatient embrace. Disturbing and funny, it may remind viewers of the cartoon conquests of Pepé Le Pew. However, it's the only scene that feels like it's breaking new ground.

Directed by Hara Keiichi, *Miss Hokusai* is produced by Production IG, which made its name internationally with the melancholy violence of *Ghost in the Shell* (1995) but has also moved into other areas. (Its co-founder Ishikawa Mitsuhisa has spoken of the studio making more "afternoon tea" subjects, as opposed to the "strong black coffee" of *Ghost in the Shell*.) After the impressionism of Ghibli's *The Tale of the Princess Kaguya* (2013), *Miss Hokusai*'s solid realism feels conservative, shifting gently between measured, formal elegance and mostly mild irreverence. The tragic (but hardly unexpected) ending is far less moving than the shamelessly sentimental end of *Giovanni's Island*, which was also made by Production IG. *Miss Hokusai* aims for something less crude, and creates adult characters who are good company on screen, but it isn't subtle enough to get under their skin. Ⓢ

cross-platform appeal, however, enabled not only a broad fan base but also friendships and musical collaborations across generic boundaries, including an appearance alongside The Band in Martin Scorsese's *The Last Waltz* (1978).

Though revered by those who worked with her – "I respected and loved Aretha Franklin, but she wasn't no Mavis Staples," says Al Bell, who brought The Staple Singers their most fruitful period of mainstream success during his tenure as boss of Stax Records – Mavis struggled to establish a consistent solo identity and faced unfortunate setbacks, as when a brace of albums produced by Prince in the late 1980s and early 1990s were largely overlooked as a result of his dispute with his then record label Warner Brothers. A later career revival with the help of ANTI- Records – an offshoot of Epitaph and a habitual rediscoverer of undervalued older artists – proved more successful, sourcing her a fashionable and devoted new producer in the form of Wilco's Jeff Tweedy, and netting her a 2010 Grammy Award.

Mavis! takes a respectfully non-intrusive approach to its subject, allowing the singer and her songs to speak for themselves. If the results can feel a touch workmanlike, few would deny that respect is the bare minimum due to the talent depicted. Not that she takes herself overly seriously. "That's the best time I've had in years," we hear her enthuse to a bandmate after a recent show. "Since I got my new knees!" Ⓢ

Credits and Synopsis

Producers Rachel Mills Jessica Edwards	Trokon Nagbe Marshall Potter	In Colour [1.78:1]
Director of Photography Keith Walker	©Film First Corp.	Distributor Dogwoof
Editor Amy Foote	Production Company A Film First production	
Interview Sound Recording Andy Black	A film by Jessica Edwards	
Executive Producers Richard Buonagurio Ron DiCanni Sharon Frye Gary Hustwit Hayden Jackson	Producers Gary Hustwit for HBO: Sheila Nevins	

A portrait, in performance footage and interviews, of the singer Mavis Staples. Commentators on her influence include Bob Dylan, Bonnie Raitt, Sharon Jones, Chuck D and Marty Stuart.

Staples first comes to prominence in the early 1960s, one of the two consistent elements of the Chicago-based family gospel troupe The Staple Singers, along with her father Roebuck 'Pops' Staples. Distinguished by the latter's blues-influenced guitar sound, The Staple Singers find mainstream recognition via association with the highly fashionable folk-rock scene, performing on TV specials alongside the young Dylan. A friendship with the Reverend Martin Luther King sees them become activists for the civil rights movement and they begin to incorporate political messages into their music. Signing to Stax records, they strike a seam of mainstream success with a string of hits including 'I'll Take You There' and 'Respect Yourself'. Mavis's efforts to forge a solo career prove patchy; in the 1980s she releases two albums produced by Prince, then finds new energy working with Wilco's Jeff Tweedy. A brief marriage is childless, with Staples explaining that her career took priority. In 2000, Pops dies; Mavis turns his bank of unreleased recordings over to Tweedy to work on.

Credits and Synopsis

Producers Matsushita Keiko Nishikawa Asako	Sarusuberi Film Partners present a Production I.G production	Tatekawa Danshun Manjido
Screenplay Maruo Miho based on the manga <i>Sarusuberi</i> by Sugiura Hinako		In Colour [1.78:1] Subtitles
Photography Tanaka Koji	Voice Cast Higashide Anne O-Ei Matsushige Yutaka Katsushika Hokusai, 'Tetsuzo'	Distributor Anime Limited
Film Editing Nishiyama Shigeru	Hamada Gaku Keisai Eisen, 'Zenjiro'	Japanese theatrical title Sarusuberi: Miss Hokusai
Art Director Ono Hiroshi	Kora Kengo Utagawa Kuninao	
Music Fuuki Harumi	Miho Jun Koto	
Lead Animator Itazu Yoshimi	Shimizu Shion O-Nao	
	Tsutsui Michitaka Totoya Hokkei, 'Hatsugoro'	
©Hinako Sugiura. MS.HS, Sarusuberi Film Partners	Aso Kumiko Sayogoromo	
Production Companies		

The city of Edo (now Tokyo), 1814. The film presents the everyday life of O-Ei, artist daughter of the famed Hokusai, whose works include the woodblock print 'The Great Wave off Kanagawa'. Father and daughter are shown working together in a messy house, striving to meet clients' deadlines. O-Ei is usually stern, though she shows a warmer side to her blind little sister O-Nao, whose health is uncertain. Hokusai himself is reluctant to see O-Nao, perhaps because of his fear of sickness. O-Ei is awkwardly attracted to rival male artist Hatsugoro, though she has no experience of romance. O-Ei witnesses supernatural phenomena in her father's company, such as a courtesan who extrudes a ghostly second head in her sleep. Told that a maiden cannot draw erotic subjects, O-Ei visits a brothel to lose her virginity to a male prostitute, but she's so hesitant that he falls asleep first. O-Ei is devastated when O-Nao dies but she continues to develop her art; her father encourages her to create her own paintings.

A caption adds that O-Ei led an itinerant life after Hokusai died, and vanished suddenly in 1857.

Noble

United Kingdom/Ireland 2013
Director: Stephen Bradley
Certificate 15 101m 8s

Reviewed by Hannah McGill

"Did you ever think you might have a vocation?" a nun asks the teenage Christina Noble (Sarah Greene) while admitting her to a convent-run home for girls. "Never," Christina shoots back. Unlike most of the certainties *Noble* grants its indomitably feisty, sardonic and selfless version of the real-life charity worker and campaigner, this one proves incorrect. Christina does indeed have a vocation, which is inspired by her own grisly childhood and brought into focus when the Vietnam War provides a backdrop to her early, abusive marriage. As an adult (played by Deirdre O'Kane), she takes herself to Ho Chi Minh City and, by sheer tenacity and force of personality, establishes herself as a provider, protector and mother figure to the numerous abandoned street children there.

Stephen Bradley's film unashamedly amps up the melodrama in its portrayal of a life beset by agonising tests, and it is no less forthright in its pushy insistence that its protagonist represents a flawless embodiment of the qualities suggested by her surname. Christina's childhood milieu – misty slums crowded with cackling Dublin peasantry, a thrashing drunk of a father and a mother coughing up blood – is presented in the theatrically lugubrious terms of a fantasy horror, with visual shades of *Pan's Labyrinth* (2006) and *The City of Lost Children* (1995). The little Christina (Gloria Cramer Curtis) is set up as preternaturally resilient, talking back to the nasty grown-ups and busking Doris Day songs for pennies to feed her siblings; and while the film adopts a more naturalistic presentation as its protagonist ages, this bulletproof saintliness remains. The real Noble has dubbed herself "Mother Teresa with balls", and the film's heavy implication is that she embodies the very dedication and virtue lacking in the nuns who provide her early care. From the tyrannical Mother Superior who slaps her when she's little to the Cypriot husband who calls her a "stupid Irish beech" and the English businessman she catches in the act of soliciting a Vietnamese child prostitute, Christina's antagonists are as blindingly wrong



Right you are: Deirdre O'Kane

as she is glowingly and unstintingly right.

The result is a film that's high on righteous passion but low on nuance. There's no space for O'Kane's performance to communicate anything but pissed-off virtue, while the people around her are without exception set up to make her look better by providing opportunities for her to sermonise or wisecrack. In Greene's middle incarnation (performance-wise by far the most persuasive of three physically and vocally dissimilar Christinas), the character is even gifted with foresight, refusing to let her evil husband take her children on a car trip that duly results in an accident.

If this glorification of its protagonist limits the film's emotional complexity, however, its points – that personal pain can be converted into moral industry, that stubborn individuals can achieve much, that witnessing suffering can be enough to turn complacency into action – come through strongly, as does its sincere effort to celebrate the real Christina Noble. Greene's fine performance and that of Ruth Negga as her best friend Joan lend the film both grace and energy while they are on screen. If a subtler treatment might have won more artistic plaudits, many will take from this grandiose version the same bluntly manipulative, guilty-pleasure appeal that characterises the Coldplay track swelling over its credits. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Melanie Gore-Grimes
Stephen Bradley
Written by
Stephen Bradley
Screenplay based on *Bridge across My Sorrows* by Christina Noble with Robert Coram; *Mama Tina* by Christina Noble and Gretta Curran Browne; and Christina Noble's life story rights
Director of Photography
Trevor Forrest
Editor
Mags Arnold
Production Designer
Cristina Casali
Music
Giles Martin
Ben Foster
Sound Recordist
Tim Fraser
Costume Designer
Charlotte Walker

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Production Companies
Ansty Productions presents in association with Destiny Films
Developed with the assistance of Bord Scannán na hÉireann/The Irish Film Board
Executive Producer
Michael J. Hunt
Film Extracts
By the Light of the Silvery Moon (1953)

Cast
Deirdre O'Kane
Christina Noble
Sarah Greene
middle Christina
Brendan Coyle
Gerry Shaw
Liam Cunningham
Thomas

Ruth Negga
Joan
Nhu Quynh Nguyen
Madame Linh
Mark Huberman
David Somers
Kinh Quoc Trung
Ngoc Tu'o'ng Le
Phan, receptionist
Lu'o'ng My
My An
Nguyen Khoa
Tien Dat
Lam
Gloria Cramer Curtis
Christina as a girl
David Mumeni
Mario

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Miracle Communications

Dublin, the 1950s. When her mother dies and her father succumbs to alcoholism, Christina Noble is separated from her siblings and placed in a convent orphanage.

As a teenager she attains independence with a factory job, but after an evening out she is gang-raped and left traumatised. She is taken into a home for young women, where she discovers that she is pregnant and gives birth to a son. He is taken from her and adopted. Christina moves to Birmingham with her friend Joan, where she marries Cypriot immigrant Mario, works in his fish-and-chip shop and bears him three children. He is violent towards her, and she leaves for London with the children.

In 1989, the middle-aged Christina moves to Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam. Having persuaded the authorities to grant her a temporary work visa, she devotes herself to the care of the city's impoverished street children. A brash English businessman she meets turns out to be sexually exploiting the local girls, and Christina has him arrested; a wealthy Irish investor agrees to give money to her charity. Christina's permit is finally extended, allowing her to remain in Ho Chi Minh City and continue her work.

Orthodox

United Kingdom/Germany 2015
Director: David Leon
Certificate 18 98m 5s

Reviewed by Anton Bitel

Ex-boxer, ex-butcher, ex-con Benjamin Levy (a brooding Stephen Graham) is patting two German shepherds tied to a leash when he first meets Daniel (Giacomo Mancini), the young Jewish drifter who has briefly left the dogs outside while shoplifting some chocolate. Soon Benjamin, himself a Jew living on the outer boundaries of an Orthodox community that has long since rejected him, will form a fatherly bond with Daniel, recognising something of himself in the boy's marginalisation (and pugilistic interests).

To suggest that those two tethered dogs are metaphors for Benjamin and Daniel, bound to forces of culture and criminality that restrain them from acting freely, might seem a reading too far, were it not for the sheer number of significant cutaways in David Leon's *Orthodox* (expanded from his own 2012 short) from Benjamin's tragic trajectory to images of caged canines. There are two symbolic 'leashes' that attach themselves to Benjamin: the bandages with which his manipulative, corrupting friend Reg Shannon (Michael Smiley) binds his fists before illegal matches, and the tefillin in which he wraps his arms and hands before morning prayers. These are the twin forces that have torn him and his family apart: the desire to fight, which has set him against his father and his community; and his determination to cling both to a failing family business and to religious tradition.

These opposing forces have led Benjamin to a series of contradictory positions: he has married outside the community, but his faith will not let him countenance his 'shikse' wife Alice (Rebecca Callard) taking up work to supplement their hand-to-mouth existence, which paradoxically drives him into more boxing and other illicit activities. Accordingly, Benjamin's desperate attempts to keep his family – Alice and their two young sons – together are precisely what will drive them apart, as the bruiser ends up in prison, only to emerge four years later into a world of loneliness and loss



Ball and chain: Stephen Graham

Patience, Patience You'll Go to Paradise!

France/Belgium/USA 2014

Director: Hadja Lahbib

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

At the opening of *Patience, Patience You'll Go to Paradise!*, Warda, the film's narrator and one of its principal subjects, summarises the boundaries that have defined her life thus far: "Five daily prayers and Thursday market."

Hadja Lahbib's documentary focuses on Warda and her circle of middle-aged friends – all of them Maghrebi immigrant women who've lived in Belgium for decades – as they begin to overstep these limitations for the first time, in most cases emboldened by the death or infirmity of their patriarchal husbands. Lahbib's film might be likened to Crystal Moselle's *The Wolfpack*, the sensation of last year's Sundance festival, which followed a band of teenage brothers wriggling out from under the thumb of their domestic tyrant father and exploring their native New York for the first time – and in fact the climax of *Patience, Patience* is a trip to NYC.

Unfortunately, Lahbib's debut also resembles *The Wolfpack* in its structural flabbiness. Having located her subjects and her theme – cloistered Muslim women discovering the pleasures of the wider secular world – Lahbib proceeds only to play variations on the same scene. As we follow the women on various field trips organised by the Dar al Amal adult institute – an expedition to the countryside, trips to a Roman Catholic cathedral and a black Baptist church, cultural excursions – we are treated to the same dazzled reaction shots of the women, and offered very little else. Such material can hardly help but be touching up to a point, but conflict is crucially absent, limited to a half-hearted storyline in which Warda withholds information about her New York trip from her husband, a development that doesn't so much resolve as evaporate before the closing credits roll.

While zooming from one activity to the next, the film occasionally settles in to watch the Dar al Amal class talking among themselves, and it is here that Lahbib's film comes nearest to offering particular insight into the lives of this immigrant subset and the crosscurrents of assimilation that buffet them about. While the children and grandchildren that we see appear to be highly



Patience, Patience You'll Go to Paradise!

westernised, this elder generation remains firmly attached to the Arab world, discussing at one point the rather recent coming of the headscarf as required attire. (This is accompanied by a rare directorial flourish, a cutaway to a reproduction of Vermeer's *Girl with a Pearl Earring*, with her covered head.) For the bulk of the movie, politics are little touched on beyond a vague advocacy of 'freedom' as espoused by the liberated 'slam' singer Tata Milouda, who becomes something of a role model, cheerleader and mascot for the group.

During their trip to New York, however, the women discuss the Syrian situation with a guide at the UN and stop to pray at the 9/11 Memorial, and at such moments one wishes they had been pressed to reveal more of their worldviews. But as soon as the surface is scratched, they're whisked off to another chartered activity, and the sense of repetition becomes acute. While it is heartening to see these ladies choosing not to wait until the afterlife for their fun, viewers have only so much patience of their own to exhaust. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

David Leon

Producer

Daisy Allsop

Written by

David Leon

Director of

Photography

Si Bell

Editor

Kelvin Hutchins

Production

Designer

Paul Frost

Composer

Simon Robbs

Sound Recordist

Aris

Anastassopoulos

Costume Designer

Matt Price

Production

Companies

Ingenious Media

presents in

association with

K5 International

A Zeitgeist Films

production

A film by David Leon

Executive

Producers

Gareth Wiley

Stephen Graham

Cast

Stephen Graham

Benjamin Levy

Michael Smiley

Reg Shannon

Giacomo Mancini

Daniel

Rebecca Callard

Alice Levy

Christopher

Fairbank

Joseph Goldberg

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Zeitgeist Films

London, present day. Estranged as a boy from his father and the Jewish Orthodox community because of his interest in boxing, Benjamin Levy is now married to Alice (a converted gentile) with two young sons, and supplements the meagre earnings from his father's butchery business with bare-knuckle fights and standover work for gym owner Reg Shannon. After accidentally killing some squatters in an arson job undertaken by Reg on behalf of local Jewish businessman Goldberg, Benjamin is imprisoned for four years. While he is in jail, Reg extorts sex from Alice. Emerging from prison to find that Alice has committed suicide and his boys are gone, Benjamin takes a job as a janitor at Reg's gym, where he meets a young part-Jewish man, Daniel, who has fallen under Reg's influence. Wishing to stay clean, Goldberg decides to sell some problem properties for development and fires Reg – but Reg secretly rents the properties to Romanian 'squatters'. Benjamin learns that his sons have been sent by Goldberg to be fostered in Israel. Daniel finds the Romanians all dead, gassed by a heater. When Goldberg informs Reg that this is Reg's problem alone, Reg batters him. Reg tries to force Daniel to set alight the Romanians' bodies, and is violent when Daniel refuses. Benjamin intervenes, and Daniel beats up Reg. Benjamin heads to Israel, and Goldberg offers help to Daniel.

Credits and Synopsis

Producer

Heike Lettau

Florian Froschmaier

Written by

Hadja Lahbib

Photography

Vincent Huffy

Jonas Canon

Yannick Dolivo

Cyril Blaise

Editor

Marie-Hélène Dozo

Original Music

Arno

Sound

Pascale Stevens

Malika El Barkani

Helene Bourgois

Bruno Schweisguth

Yann-Elie Gorans

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Les Passeurs de

Lumière, RTBF

Production

Companies

Les Passeurs de

Lumière present

in co-production with RTBF - Unité de Programmes Documentaires, Arte, Clair-obscur Productions
Produced with the assistance of the Centre du Cinéma et de l'Audiotvisuel de la Fédération Wallonie-Bruxelles and the VOO
A film realised with the support of La Fondation Roi Baudouin, La Loterie Nationale, L'Ambassade des Etats-Unis à Bruxelles, La COCOF Commission communautaire française, L'Espace Magh, Les Halles - Daba Maroc, Brussels Airlines, Le Foyer - Dar al Amal
A co-production

Les Passeurs de Lumière, Clair-obscur Productions, RTBF
Télévision Belge - Unité Documentaires

In Colour

[1.78:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

DocHouse

French theatrical title

Patience, patience

T'iras au paradis!

A documentary about a group of middle-aged Maghrebi women who arrived in Belgium from Morocco in the 1960s and 1970s. After leading lives devoted entirely to their husbands and families, Warda and Mina now find themselves with free time. Mina takes her first trip to the theatre on a visit to Morocco, and sees a one-woman show by slam performer Tata Milouda, who discusses her philosophy of enjoying life on earth rather than waiting for reward in heaven. Mina and Warda enrol in classes at Dar al Amal, an adult education institute serving Maghrebi women; they and others from the class go on field trips to a Roman Catholic cathedral, to a museum, to the opera and to the countryside – a first for many of the women, who bond over their shared experiences. The women receive increasingly regular visits from Milouda, whom they accompany to an audition in Ostend and then on a trip to New York. In New York they visit the daughter of a friend who is working as a lawyer, go on a tour of the UN and worship at a Baptist church in Harlem. Warda returns home to her infirm husband, who accepts her newfound independence, leaving the door open for future adventures.

Point Break

USA/Germany/Austria 2015
Director: Ericson Core
Certificate 12A 113m 41s

Reviewed by Adam Nayman

Why would a major American studio attempt a new version of a modern genre classic on the eve of its 25th anniversary? And if the culprit is not simply the same profit motive that catalyses almost all such superfluous do-overs – ie, if the people involved really care about what they're doing here – then does this remake of *Point Break* deserve the benefit of the doubt?

In a word, no. Kathryn Bigelow's 1991 film remains a masterclass in action choreography, and since there's pretty much zero chance of improving on its aesthetic and entertainment value, a new *Point Break* would be needless even if it were well done. And this film is not well done. It's very, very poor, and the sense of impoverishment extends to every level of the production: the dialogue is atrocious; the actors look lost; anxious editing undermines the adroit stunt work. Directing for the second time in a career distinguished by big-ticket cinematography credits – most notably 2001's *The Fast and the Furious* – Ericson Core fails to orchestrate anything on the level of the great set pieces of his source material, even as he liberally cribs from Bigelow's style book.

The tone is off from the very first sequence, a prologue sketching the origin story of hero Johnny Utah (Luke Bracey) – recast from college football star to sponsor-mongering extreme athlete and introduced flinging himself across mountainous sand dunes on a motocross bike. His partner proves less adept at this game and plummets to his death, which prompts Johnny to straighten up, fly right and join the FBI, where his skill set equips him to go undercover among a group of bank robbers who've integrated surfing and skydiving into their illegal routines. In Bigelow's film, the preposterousness of the plot was the launch-pad for a wry interrogation of alpha-male bonding and codes of honour; here, it's played almost totally for po-faced seriousness.

The main offender is Edgar Ramirez,



The bandit wagon: Edgar Ramirez, Luke Bracey

whose take on the duplicitous guru Bodhi is at once more exotic and less empathetic than Patrick Swayze's original performance; this version of the character is a political agitator and environmental warrior, and yet his mission to meld a series of death-defying challenges to violent Robin Hood-style robberies targeting rapacious corporations doesn't resonate compared to his predecessor's everything-Zen modus operandi. The subtext of seduction that made Bigelow's *Point Break* so audacious – and funny – is muted; instead of Keanu Reeves's straight arrow bent sexily out of shape, Bracey comes off as a sullen wannabe without any palpable connection to either the authority figures above him or the bad guys operating outside the law.

So in the first *Point Break*, when Johnny hesitates to shoot Bodhi during a chase scene and ends up emptying his weapon into the sky, it means something in both dramatic and symbolic terms: that Bodhi is wearing a Ronald Reagan mask while he's in his younger rival's sights smartly evokes Gen-X impotence. Here, the same showdown plays out perfunctorily, as nothing more than muscle memory – the automatic reflexivity of a movie with no compelling reason to exist, and nothing better to do than to call attention to that fact. ☹

The Propaganda Game

Spain/France 2015
Director: Álvaro Longoria

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

Although Alvaro Longoria's documentary about North Korea inevitably raises more questions than it answers (and many of the questions that it explicitly asks are visibly elided), it's strikingly different from other recent portraits of the 'hermit kingdom', in that the vast majority of it was actually shot there, entirely openly, and with the authorities' apparent blessing – although this in turn strongly suggests that what Longoria films has been as carefully stage-managed as any of the excerpted North Korean propaganda videos. Even when he seeks to sidestep the official itinerary, his visit to a Christian church is only authorised after "many phone calls", and he also repeatedly draws attention to such details as the surprising lack of visitors to Pyongyang's huge War Museum on the day that he happened to go there himself.

In short, Longoria doesn't hide his scepticism. Halfway through the film he snatches a moment to confide on camera that this is the first time he's been left unsupervised in five days, a monologue that's swiftly interrupted by the return of his minder. The propaganda game being played is conducted by both North Korea and its antagonists, and we're playing the game too, at least in so far as it's generally left up to us to draw our own conclusions. We're told that foreign films are prohibited, and yet Pixar's *Brave* is playing on television during a visit to a Pyongyang flat. But is this typical, or are the owners of large flat-screen televisions part of an unspecified elite, at the top of the 'songbun' class system? Is the model collective farm that Longoria visits truly representative of what happens in the rural parts of the country, allegedly riven by famine? We aren't told, because Longoria isn't either.

But while Longoria also includes numerous counter-examples of "western imperialist propaganda" (usually via clips from US news channels such as CNN and Fox, the last of which doesn't bother to hide its openly derisive attitude), it's harder to ignore the onscreen testimony of long-term North Korea watchers like Barbara Demick and Andrei Lankov, authors of two of the most eye-opening recent books on the country – respectively, *Nothing to Envy* (2009) and *The Real North Korea: Life and Politics in the Failed Stalinist Utopia* (2013) – as well as representatives from Amnesty International, the UN (Michael Kirby) and elsewhere. Not least because they themselves are prepared to challenge the western propagandist line – for instance, Demick debunks the widely circulated story of Kim Jong-un's uncle Jang Song-thaek being dragged out of the Politburo, given a show trial and fed to ravenous dogs while still alive. The first two charges are supported by evidence, but the last seems to have been fabricated by a Chinese blogger.

In sharp contrast, Longoria's North Korean interviewees strictly toe the official line, with minders stepping in to politely but firmly deal with potentially awkward questions (in one memorable case, concerning the contents of a domestic fridge). The voluble Spanish-born Alejandro Cao de Benós would initially appear to offer more of a bridge between the two perspectives (he secured permission for Longoria and his crew to film in the first place), but it quickly becomes clear that he's even more of

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Andrew A. Kosove
Broderick Johnson
John Baldecchi
David Valdés
Christopher Taylor
Kurt Wimmer
Screenplay
Kurt Wimmer
Story
Rick King
W. Peter Iliff
Kurt Wimmer
Based upon the motion picture *Point Break* [1991].
Screenplay by W. Peter Iliff, Story by Rick King, W. Peter Iliff

Director of Photography

Ericson Core

Edited by

Thom Noble
Jerry Greenberg
John Duffy

Production Designer

Udo Kramer

Music

Tom Holkenborg

Re-recording Mixers

Michael Minkler

Costume Designer

Lisy Christl

Visual Effects by

UPP

Image Engine

Digital Sandbox, LLC

Spin VFX

Lola VFX

Stunt Co-ordinators

Mic Rodgers
Raif Haeger

©Alcon

Entertainment, LLC

Production Companies

Alcon Entertainment

presents in

association with

DMG Entertainment

a Taylor-Baldecchi-

Wimmer production

A Studio Babelsberg

co-production

An Ericson Core film

Produced with the

support of Deutscher

Filmförderfonds,

Medienboard, FFF

Bayern, Cine Tirol

Executive Producers

Robert L. Levy

Peter Abrams

Dan Mintz

Wu Bing

John McMurrick

Cast

Edgar Ramirez

Bodhi

Luke Bracey

Johnny Utah

Teresa Palmer

Samsara

Delroy Lindo

Instructor Hall

Ray Winstone

Pappas

Dolby Digital/Dolby

Atmos/DTS Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Some screenings

presented in 3D

Distributor

Warner Bros. Pictures

International (UK)

Present day. Following the death of his best friend in a motocross accident, extreme-sports star Johnny Utah joins the FBI. He's given the task of infiltrating a criminal gang who operate using skills similar to his own. Determining that they are attempting a legendary series of globetrotting physical trials known as the 'Ozaki Eight', Johnny heads to Biarritz to intercept them on the ocean. He surfs out on a massive wave and, getting into trouble, is rescued by the robbers' leader, Bodhi, who offers him cryptic advice and eventually invites him to join the gang. Gradually, Johnny realises that Bodhi is planning his crimes around the itinerary of the Ozaki Eight. While his FBI superiors remain sceptical, Johnny becomes Bodhi's best friend, only revealing his true identity in the middle of a botched operation at a gold mine; he fails to apprehend Bodhi and is almost taken off the case. The FBI tracks Bodhi's gang to France, where there is a violent shootout at a mountaintop bank. In Venezuela, Johnny chases Bodhi up a sheer rock face before the two tumble into the water below. Bodhi's body isn't found; Johnny knows he's still alive and trying to complete the Eight.

Some months later, Johnny flies over the ocean in an FBI helicopter to try to stop Bodhi attempting his final suicidal ordeal. However, he thinks better of it and flies home.

Ride Along 2

USA/Japan 2015
Director: Tim Story
Certificate 12A 101m 32s

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Concluding his *Sight & Sound* review of the 2014 film *Ride Along*, Adam Nayman observed: "The noticeably abrupt ending suggests reshoots while leaving things open for an inevitable and, it goes without saying, inessential sequel." So, inevitably, inessentially, here's *Ride Along 2*, dispiritingly thrown together by once promising director Tim Story. Notionally top-billed straight man Ice Cube and diminutive, domineering comedy sidekick Kevin Hart are back, with Ken Jeong from the *Hangover* films and grown-up Olivia Munn added to the team to provide, respectively, another brand of ethnic comedy and foxiness in action and on the dance floor.

The set-up scene has a cameo from Tyrese Gibson as Mayfield, the kind of action-movie cop that Cube's seething James ought to have for a partner... only his foul-up prospective brother-in-law Ben barges into a sting operation (doing an outdated gangsta shtick that prompts one of the criminals to beg his boss to let him kill the clown quickly), drops his police badge in plain view and then shoots Mayfield in the shoulder. Even in the elastic universe of knockabout comedy, it's hard to sell the notion that wounding another officer wouldn't lead to immediate suspension and (considering Ben's probationary status) dismissal from the force. This doesn't happen for the same reason that white drug dealer Troy doesn't have Ben summarily executed in Scene One. Without Hart, the *Ride Alongs* would be the sort of direct-to-DVD action movies Steven Seagal has been making for years. With the comedian on board, Cube toplines a series of guaranteed hits that even an outing as poor as this won't derail.

There's been a tragic fall-off in the quality of African-American cop comedies, which were never that great in the first place. Though a franchise-spawning hit, *Beverly Hills Cop* was a tamer Eddie Murphy film than *48 Hrs* or *Trading Places* and now looks like the moment he stopped being an interesting (and funny) screen presence. The *Bad Boys* series set the template the *Ride Along* films stick to (on a much lower budget, with far



Bad riding 'hood: Ice Cube, Kevin Hart

fewer stunts and explosions), with conventional leading man Will Smith shackled to hyperactive comedy partner Martin Lawrence. Wherever Lawrence is these days, one hopes there's room for Hart next to him. It seems harsh to complain that Hart's comic persona is overly annoying, since the film makes a point of having all the other characters find him irritating – but Hart takes the risky strategy of comic obnoxiousness and runs it into the ground. Ben is inept, self-centred, crass and cruel – no more funny when taking a hit to the balls than when dishing out punishment. And he's the nicer guy in the duo.

Given the state of race relations and armed policing in America, acknowledged here only by the use (without seeming irony) of KRS-One's angry 'Sound of da Police' under the end credits, it's a stretch to find gags about cops shooting innocent (or even guilty) people funny, even when a fortuitously bulletproof-vested paranoid Cuban-American gets up and trigger-happy Ben cocks his gun again, shrieking "Zombie, headshot, walking dead!" It's an even bigger ask to expect chuckles from Cube's cop catchphrase: "I'm gonna shoot you in the face."



Land and freedom: *The Propaganda Game*

an overt apologist for Kim Jong-un's regime as he stonewalls question after question about concentration camps, famine and the lack of freedom of speech while cheerfully pointing out evidence of failed western embargoes.

If Longoria's film is ultimately a somewhat frustrating experience, for once this is less a reflection on the filmmaker than on the fact that his subject virtually guarantees such frustration, and that he was fully aware of this going in. He debunks some western propagandist myths along the way, though they're inevitably the superficial ones: North Koreans do not wear a compulsory uniform and the men are not required to adopt Kim Jong-un's hairstyle. But the bigger questions remain as open as ever.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Álvaro Longoria

Written by

Álvaro Longoria

Directors of Photography

Diego Dussuel

Rita Noriega

Edited by

Alex Marquez

Victoria Lammers

Original Music

Fernando Velázquez

Sound Editor

Charly Schmukler

@Morena Films,

También la lluvia AIE

Production Companies

Memento Films

presents a Morena

Films production

With

Álvaro Longoria

In Colour

[1.78:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Metrodome

Distribution Ltd

A documentary portrait of present-day North Korea, as depicted through footage shot within the country (mostly its capital Pyongyang) and interviews with various inhabitants (and Spanish-born Alejandro Cao de Benós, founder of the Korean Friendship Association), intercut with contributions from North Korea specialists elsewhere. Subjects covered include the Korean War, the Demilitarised Zone, the national philosophy of 'juche', the class system of 'songbun', people's aspirations, local reactions to nuclear tests, the Hollywood film 'The Interview', the 1990s famines, the purges following the accession of the country's present ruler Kim Jong-un in 2011 and speculation concerning the regime's future.

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Will Packer

Ice Cube

Matt Alvarez

Larry Brezner

Written by

Phil Hay

Matt Manfredi

Based on characters

created by Greg

Coolidge

Director of Photography

Mitchell Amundsen

Editor

Peter S. Elliot

Production Designer

Chris Cornwell

Music

Christopher Lennertz

Production Sound Mixer

David Husby

Costume Designer

Olivia Miles

Stunt Co-ordinators

Jack Gill

Brian Machleit

Andrew Gill

@Universal Studios

Production Companies

Universal Pictures

presents a Will

Packer Productions/

Cubevision

production

A Tim Story film

Presented in

association with

Dentsu Inc./

Fuji Television

Network, Inc.

Completed with

assistance from

the Georgia Film,

Music & Digital

Entertainment Office

Executive Producers

Nicolas Stern

Ron Muhammad

Scott Bernstein

Chris Bender

JC Spink

Cast

Ice Cube

James Payton

Kevin Hart

Ben Barber

Ken Jeong

AJ

Benjamin Bratt

Antonio Pope

Olivia Munn

Maya Cruz

Bruce McGill

Lt. Brooks

Tika Sumpter

Angela Payton

Sherri Shepherd

Cori

Glen Powell

Troy

Tyrese Gibson

Mayfield

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Universal Pictures

International

UK & Eire

Atlanta, US. Detective James Payton and his partner Mayfield prepare to bust drug dealer Troy. Their cover is blown by Ben Barber, a rookie officer who is engaged to James's sister Angela. Having accidentally injured Mayfield, Ben nags James into taking him to Miami to interrogate hacker AJ, who has encrypted a flash drive for Troy. AJ has embezzled from his boss Antonio Pope, an ostensibly respectable businessman who is running a smuggling empire. James and Ben apprehend AJ, who takes them to a club to ditch them. They save his life when Pope's hired killer turns up, so he agrees to help them find evidence against the crime boss. With local policewoman Maya, James and Ben trick their way into a party at Pope's mansion and steal files from his computer. Using information from the files, James intercepts one of Pope's trucks only to find it empty – he has been set up, and his chief, Lieutenant Brooks, orders him off the case. Tracking a real shipment of guns and drugs to the docks, James and Ben get into a shootout with Pope and his gang and close the case. James invites Maya to accompany him to Ben and Angela's wedding. After the ceremony, Ben and Angela leave by speedboat, only for Ben to fall out and be painfully dragged through the water.

Strangerland

Australia/Ireland/Netherlands/USA/France 2014
Director: Kim Farrant

Reviewed by Jason Anderson

"Kids go missing out here," an elderly Aboriginal woman tells Nicole Kidman's desperate mother in *Strangerland*. "It's the land." Of course, the notion that there's a sinister force lurking in the scorched terrains of the outback will be no surprise to anyone who's seen *Wake in Fright* (1971), *Walkabout* (1971), *Picnic at Hanging Rock* (1975) or any other entry in Australian cinema's long tradition of films that fill the region's inhospitable natural environments with elements of post-colonial guilt, sexual anxiety and Aboriginal mysticism.

Of the moments in Kim Farrant's drama which evoke that force – if never actually explain it, which is another part of the tradition – the most startling comes in the form of a dream that Kidman's character Catherine experiences three times: it consists of a flyover shot of the menacing gorge that may have swallowed up her two children, followed by the image of a nude female far in the distance, the contours of her body distorted by the desert heat. Catherine's vision is one of many tantalising aspects of Farrant's provocative drama. Unfortunately, it's also one of a surfeit of ideas in a film that becomes too overloaded to develop the tension it needs.

Strangerland's gradual loss of drive and direction is all the more disappointing given the verve of Kidman's performance, which adds a carnal counterpoint to the film's more mystical trappings. Though Catherine fits into the star's lineage of fraught-mother roles in such films as *The Others* (2001) and *Rabbit Hole* (2010), she's a more sexual figure. Her torment over her children's disappearance is compounded by her worries that her daughter exhibits a brazenness that she's tried to suppress in herself. In one of the film's boldest scenes, Catherine puts on one of Lily's crop tops and comes on to her daughter's secret boyfriend. Even when she isn't acting out or literally howling in the



Wanderlust: Maddison Brown, Sean Keenan

night, the crisis compels her to question her own worthiness both as a woman and a mother. "Did I do something wrong?" she laments to husband Matthew about the bad seed they couldn't control even before she vanished. "Well," he spits back, "she didn't get it from me, did she?"

Making her feature debut, Farrant shows a welcome eagerness to venture into many of the same murky corners of female sexuality that Jane Campion explored in 2003's *In the Cut*. (In fact Kidman spent five years developing that project with Campion before dropping out due to the demands of her divorce from Tom Cruise.) Alas, Farrant is less successful when it comes to the mystery aspects, and *Strangerland* sputters out when it flirts with a supernatural explanation via talk of a legendary rainbow serpent.

Strangerland's high degree of visual stylisation can also be problematic, as when Farrant sacrifices the spare, steely nature of the film's best scenes for something more florid. A showstopper set in a red dust storm may be more suited to Richard Stanley's desert-madness freak-out *Dust Devil* (1992) than this often valiant effort to add a more adult component to the pubescent stirrings of *Picnic at Hanging Rock*. 

The Survivalist

United Kingdom/Germany 2015
Director: Stephen Fingleton

See Rushes,
page 11

Reviewed by Anton Bitel

"Surely you could spare something," says Kathryn (Olwen Fouéré), stumbling, starved, into a small woodland farm with her teenage daughter Milja (Mia Goth). "There's more than enough."

"That's what they all thought," replies the farm's sole resident (Martin McCann), never named in the film and credited only as the titular 'Survivalist'. He is referring not just to the other intruders who have ended up dead and buried after stepping into the traps he's set about the property, but also more generally to a society that, without enough to live on, suddenly collapsed several years earlier. This cataclysmic event is depicted at the film's beginning as a piece of plain animation: a red line corresponding to the world's population and a blue line representing oil production are both seen to rise in parallel, until the latter suddenly plummets, followed quickly by the former. This simple portrayal of the end times – neither a spectacular bang nor a subdued whimper – may in part have been necessitated by budgetary considerations, but it is also starkly effective in its minimalist understatement, reducing the human race, and its unravelling, to a mere statistical graphic.

The rest of Stephen Fingleton's film is a similar return to basics, scaling down human life to the hard, Darwinian business of survival. Apart from the occasional incursion of raiders, or of the protagonist's haunting memories, this is essentially a three-hander – a chamber piece played out with cabin-fever intensity (and lots of high-angle interiors to maximise the sense of claustrophobia) between a loner who craves company as much as food, a mother who will do anything to preserve her daughter and herself, and a young woman who sees a different future. While post-apocalyptic cinema is often sparse and intimate, it is also typically arid – think of the dry desertescapes of the *Mad Max* franchise, or the desaturated dead zones of John Hillcoat's *The Road* (2009) – whereas in Fingleton's vision, humanity's loss has been the rest of nature's gain. The dominant colour here, beyond the confines of the Survivalist's tin-and-timber shack, is not sandy ochre or ashen grey but a brilliant, fertile green. Still, in this tale of severe shortage, the sylvan setting, though belonging to a near future, might as well be medieval – and the niceties of moral conduct have also taken a backward, backwoods turn.

"You're getting sentimental," complains Kathryn in the face of Milja's reluctance simply to murder their host when his guard is down. "You're getting old," is Milja's purely pragmatic response, for she recognises his usefulness: "He was the one who saved me." Fingleton, too, eschews sentimentality in his stripped-down screenplay, ascribing any act that might be construed as altruism to a cold utilitarian calculus. The *Survivalist* and Milja may come to love each other (who knows?), but their relationship is presented entirely in terms of sexual commerce and the optimisation of livelihood – and, far from being a victim or an object, Milja plays this game as well as the other two, if not better. The trio will eventually form something of a family

Credits and Synopsis

Producer

Naomi Wenck
Macdara Kelleher

Written by

Fiona Seres
Michael Kiriros

Story

Fiona Seres

Director of Photography

PJ Dillon

Editor

Veronika Jenet

Production Designer

Melinda Doring

Music

Keefus Cancia

Sound Designer

Liam Egan

Costume Designer

Emily Seresin

©Screen Australia,

Screen NSW and

Parker Pictures

Holdings Pty Ltd

Production Companies

A Screen Australia

and Worldview

Entertainment

presentation

in association with

Screen NSW and

Bord Scannán

na hÉireann/The

Irish Film Board

and Wild Bunch

A Dragonfly Pictures

and Fastnet Films

production

Supported by the

Directors of the

Binger FilmLab

Developed with

the assistance

of Bord Scannán

na hÉireann/The

Irish Film Board

Financed with

the assistance

of Soundfirm

Financed in

association with

Fulcrum Media

Finance

Financed and

developed in

association with

Screen NSW and its

Regional Filming Fund

Principal

Development

and production

investor Australian

Government

Screen Australia

Executive Producers

Andrew Mackie

Richard Payten

Bryce Menzies

Sarah E. Johnson

Adriana L. Randall

Molly Connors

Maria Cestone

Cast

Nicole Kidman

Catherine Parker

Joseph Fiennes

Matthew Parker

Hugo Weaving

Detective David Rae

Lisa Flanagan

Coreen

Meyne Wyatt

Burtie

Maddison Brown

Lily Parker

Nicholas Hamilton

Tom Parker

Dolby Digital

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Wildcard Distribution

Australia, present day. Newcomers to an isolated outback town, Matthew and Catherine Parker live a mundane existence with 15-year-old daughter Lily and younger son Tommy. Lily's sexually precocious behaviour and Tommy's late-night wanderings are signs of troubles in the family's recent past. One evening, Matthew watches both children walk into the darkness but lets them go. When they fail to return by the following morning, Catherine alerts police officer Rae. Matthew admits to Rae that they moved from their previous town because Lily had an affair with a teacher, whom Matthew then assaulted. Catherine discovers Lily's diary and reads of dalliances with locals including Burtie, a young man who worked on their house. She is tormented by strange phone calls; Matthew is the subject of rumours that he may have had a sexual relationship with Lily. Matthew learns about Lily's affair with Burtie and beats up the young man. When Burtie later comes to the Parkers' home, a drunk Catherine makes a sexual advance. Searching the desert, Matthew finds Tommy, dehydrated and delirious. Increasingly distraught, Catherine tries to seduce Rae before going to search the desert. She later returns naked. After taking her home, Matthew informs her that Tommy told him he saw Lily get into a stranger's car. Matthew also says he let the children leave because he wanted to punish Lily. The next morning, Matthew and Catherine console each other on their porch.



Post-apocalypse now: Martin McCann

unit, working and eating alongside one another, but as soon as their subsistence crop has been destroyed and once again there are not enough resources to go around, the apocalypse recurs in miniature, with even the strong mother-daughter bond that has kept Kathryn and Milja together for so long proving negotiable.

Taking place in the same world that featured in Fingleton's short film *Magpie* (2014), the taut drama of *The Survivalist* poses questions about the meaning of survival, be it individual, genetic or cultural. Even as the protagonist, when we first meet him, is slowly working through the pages of a Bible and a collection of personal photographs as fuel for the fireplace,

memories of the past keep resurfacing, as do biblical lessons about sacrifice. If the *Survivalist* is living a lonely, empty existence that can have no long-term future, the arrival of Kathryn and her daughter allows him, however briefly, to create a sustainable if precarious society – and Milja's unplanned (and at first unwanted) pregnancy offers both new anxieties, and new hope. Ultimately the viewer must unpick what has been lost for ever, and what has endured.

In a moment of crisis, the anonymous *Survivalist* reveals to Milja his dead brother's name, to be preserved in memory, perhaps even in a descendant. Judging by this spare but confident debut, Fingleton's name is also one to remember. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Wayne Marc Godfrey
Robert Jones
David Gilbery
Written by
Stephen Fingleton
Story
Stephen Fingleton
Director of Photography
Damien Elliott
Editor
Mark Towns
Production Designer

Dick Lunn
Sound Mixer
Chris Woodcock
Costume Designer
Susan Scott

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Film One Limited, The
British Film Institute
Production Companies
The Fyzz Facility, BFI
and Northern Ireland
Screen present a

Fyzz Facility Film
One production
A Stephen
Fingleton film
In association
with Goldcrest, K5
International
Developed with
the support of the
BFI's Film Fund
Developed with
the assistance of
Northern Ireland
Screen/Arts Council

of Northern Ireland
Made with the
support of the
BFI's Film Fund
Executive Producers
Simon Lewis
Arnaud Lannic
Christophe Lannic
Nick Quested
Oliver Simon
Daniel Baur
Natascha Wharton

Cast
Martin McCann
survivalist
Mia Goth
Milja
Olwen Fouéré
Kathryn
Barry Ward
the forager
Douglas Russell
snatcher
Andrew Simpson
gaunt man
Ryan McParland

raider leader
Michael Og Lane
young lookout

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Bulldog Film
Distributors

Taking Stock

United Kingdom 2015
Director: Maeve Murphy
Certificate 15 75m 7s

Reviewed by Anna Smith

Kelly Brook dons a beret and plays a Bonnie and Clyde fanatic in a British comedy written and directed by Maeve Murphy (*Silent Grace*). Her character, shopworker Kate, attempts to draw inspiration from her idols and rob her boss Christina (Lorna Brown), but any success she has is more by accident than design. Tottering around in high heels, pratfalling and shouting "Oh, my boobs!" she is intended as a comical figure, but laughs are lacking in this laboured crime caper, in which outdated gender clichés abound.

Brook can certainly work the camera, and cinematographer Gerry Vasbenter presents London – chiefly King's Cross – in an amiably sunny light, occasionally dipping into black-and-white *Bonnie and Clyde*-style dream sequences. But the pacing is slow and the editing odd: a key dramatic scene is intercut with an awkward comedy interlude, draining it of any potential tension. Supporting actors lack conviction and the plot stretches credulity – this is a London populated by terrible criminals and worse police.

Still, points for at least portraying a racially diverse London, and the theoretically amusing concept of a post-heist chase on Boris bikes. **S**



Georgia Groome, Kelly Brook, Jay Brown

Credits and Synopsis

Producer
Maeve Murphy
Geoff Austin
Written by
Maeve Murphy
Screenplay based
entirely on the short
film *Sushi* written
and directed by
Maeve Murphy
Director of Photography
Gerry Vasbenter
Editor
Anuree De Silva
Production Designer
Byron Broadbent
Composer
David Long
Sound Recordist

Edwin Weiss
Costume Designer
Barbara
Elum-Baldres

©Taking Stock
Films Ltd
Production Companies
A Maeve Murphy film
Developed with
the assistance of
Northern
Ireland Screen
Executive Producer
Frank Mannion

Cast
Kelly Brook
Kate

Jay Brown
Nick
Lorna Brown
Christina
Georgia Groome
Kelly
Junichi Kajjoka
Yoichi
Femi Oyeniran
Sponge
Scot Williams
Matt

In Colour and Black & White
[1.85:1]

Distributor
Swipe Films

Northern Ireland, the future. Fossil fuels have run out and society has collapsed. The *Survivalist* lives alone in a woodland cabin with a subsistence garden, where he has buried the intruders caught in his animal traps. One morning, grey-haired Kathryn and her teenage daughter Milja arrive. Kathryn offers Milja to the *Survivalist* in exchange for board and lodging, and the three form an uneasy collective. Milja secretly steals the *Survivalist*'s shotgun shells. Kathryn is about to kill the *Survivalist* when Milja is snatched by an intruder. In a standoff (and without ammunition), the *Survivalist* is shot, but he stabs the intruder. Milja persuades Kathryn that the *Survivalist* is useful, and they tend him back to health.

A raiding party destroys the crop. With food running

low, Milja tries to carry out an abortion before the others realise she is pregnant. Kathryn instructs Milja to kill the *Survivalist* so that the two of them will have enough to last the winter. Milja poisons Kathryn instead. The *Survivalist* finishes Kathryn off, at her own request. The armed raiders return when Milja and the *Survivalist* are outside. Milja sneaks in through the roof and recovers the precious seed collection. As they are chased, the *Survivalist* reveals his late brother's name to Milja, and creates a diversion so that she can escape. He is captured and killed, and the cabin burnt down.

Milja, still pregnant, wanders into a large, well-guarded farming community where she can see mothers and children.

London, the present. Aspiring actress Kate learns that the furniture store where she works will close at the end of the week. Her boyfriend leaves her, and she considers suicide. Knowing there is money in the safe at work, Kate plots to rob her boss Christina. Workmates Kelly and Nick join the plan, though Nick and his friend Sponge secretly plot to take all the cash. Kate flirts with shop accountant Matt in an attempt to discover the safe code, and he wants in on the heist. The gang stage a break-in; Nick and Sponge demand the code from Matt at knifepoint. They cycle off with the cash but Kate and Matt give chase and grab the money. Kate takes the money and moves to Paris. Matt joins her there.

13 Hours The Secret Soldiers of Benghazi

USA 2015
Director: Michael Bay
Certificate 15 144m 18s

Reviewed by Adam Nayman

Michael Bay is an all-or-nothing proposition. You're either in or you're out – a with-us-or-against-us equation that has its roots in his work. In his career-making television commercials, Bay turned the historically innocuous act of hawking dairy products into a referendum on the consumer's masculinity. The omnipresent 'Got Milk?' slogan blaring from TV broadcasts and spread across billboards in the early 90s wasn't a query so much as a taunt – the rhetorical equivalent of "Do you feel thirsty? Well, do you, punk?"

The polarities of Bay's reputation mirror those in the larger American culture, which has in turn been shaped by his films. Chances are that the six ex-military 'private contractors' who comprised the CIA 'annex security team' stationed in Benghazi in the autumn of 2012 watched a few Michael Bay movies in their day. Which brings us to *13 Hours*, which clarifies once and for all which side the director is on (spoiler – it's the right) while paradoxically handing his detractors a substantially tougher nut to crack with their critical cudgels. If anybody ever doubted that the director of *The Rock* (1996) and *Armageddon* (1998) had a hard-on for military hardware, this gleaming inventory of American agents and assets abroad closes the case. At the same time, it's difficult to deny that Bay's technocratic flashiness suits a fact-based story about US soldiers defending a fortified citadel with high-powered assault weapons; 15 years after flopping with the Greatest Generation tribute *Pearl Harbor*, Bay has found a higher-voltage outlet for both his combat fetish and his reactionary patriotism.

Chuck Hogan's script doesn't play politics with the Benghazi narrative as much as one might expect, although it does suggest certain differences of opinion. It frames the security team as avatars of hands-on ingenuity and selfless bravery roped in by effete, obfuscating superiors – on the ground and in Washington. This latter group is obsessed with procedure at the expense of American lives, and the collision



Still standing: John Krasinski

of ideologies – less hawk-versus-dove than eagle-versus-chickenshit – indicates a broken chain of command. The moral authority goes to the grunts (played in stolid alpha-male performances by John Krasinski, James Badge Dale, David Denman and others), jacked, buffed and strapped dudes dutifully trying to live up to and preserve the myths their country has been founded on.

13 Hours gets inside that aura of Yankee exceptionalism and lives there for nearly two-and-a-half hours. Where filmmakers such as Kathryn Bigelow and Paul Greengrass have recently tried to subvert the presentation of American military might, Bay revels in it, both for its visual possibilities – the smeary digital cinematography is by Dion Beebe – and its sense of lethal certainty. It is basically a siege film, with crack-shot heroes using faceless hordes of insurgents for target practice. On those grounds, it's impressively effective – and probably honest to the perspectives of the men whose story it tells. But Bay has no sense of politics, or tragedy. Instead of a thoughtful meditation on heroism and sacrifice, we get something that feels like *American Sniper* with its uneasy insides scooped out. At its worst and most cravenly crowd-pleasing moments, it could be the Hollywood version of the German propaganda epic depicted in Quentin Tarantino's *Inglourious Basterds*. Got *Nation's Pride*?

Time out of Mind

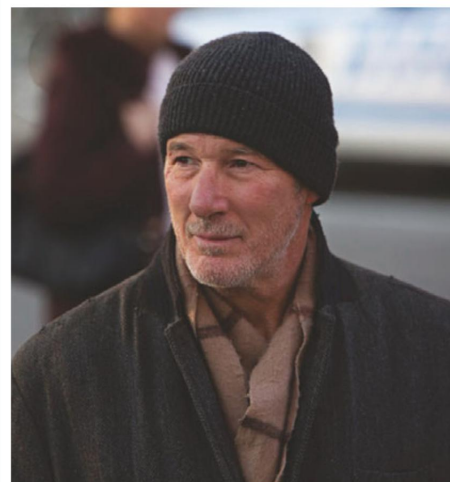
USA 2014
Director: Oren Moverman

Reviewed by Lisa Mullen

Oren Moverman's examination of the plight of the homeless doesn't exactly say anything new, but its lyrical sensibility and hypnotic rhythms make a powerful statement about what it's like to live on the blurry edge of society's field of vision. George (Richard Gere) is a liminal character in every way. A long-term drunk who can barely mumble out a complete sentence, he is incapable even of inhabiting the centre of Moverman's carefully disrupted frame, appearing instead as a shuffling presence barely noticed through a dirty window, or glimpsed behind and between the busy, assertive New York citizens who bustle across the foreground with somewhere important to go. Lingering two-shots in which lengthy conversations take place frequently obscure one or other of the people involved, or cut off their voices behind a closing door; the very fabric of the city seems to get in our way when we try to take hold of George's story.

By constantly sabotaging our expectation of a clear view, Moverman comes close to alienating and exasperating the audience, but the film is finally persuasive in its attempt to make us share the helpless passivity that George succumbs to, and the frustration of the well-meaning people who don't just walk by but try to come to his aid. For although the Kafkaesque welfare system seems rigged against him, George is frequently met with kindness and patience – even the building manager (Steve Buscemi) who evicts him from a semi-derelict squat in the film's opening scene is broadly sympathetic.

Buscemi's cameo (his face is barely seen but his voice is of course unmistakable) is the first of a series of generous supporting turns by the likes of Kyra Sedgwick and Geraldine Hughes, who contribute outsize acting chops to small roles. The two performances that anchor the film, though, are Gere's and Ben Vereen's as Dixon, the battered ex-jazzman who befriends George at a homeless shelter. Gere manages to disappear almost completely into his role, only exercising his twinkly charisma in the few rare flashes that sketch in the contours of George's old life as a chancer and a charmer. With George now almost completely wordless, it's Vereen who gets all the best lines, in an incessant stream of self-validation that he's pathologically incapable



On the skids: Richard Gere

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Erwin Stoff
Michael Bay
Written by
Chuck Hogan
Based on the book *13 Hours* by Mitchell Zuckoff and members of the Annex Security Team
Director of Photography
Dion Beebe
Edited by
Pietro Scalia

Michael McCusker
Calvin Wimmer
Production Designer
Jeffrey Beecroft
Music
Lorne Balfe
Supervising Sound Editors
Ethan Van Der Ryn
Erik Aadahl
Costume Designer
Deborah L. Scott
Stunt Co-ordinator
Ken Bates

©Paramount Pictures Corporation
Production Companies
Paramount Pictures presents
A 3 Arts Entertainment/Bay Films production
A Michael Bay film
Executive Producers
Scott Gardenhour
Richard Abate
Matthew Cohan

Cast

James Badge Dale
Tyronne Woods, 'Rone'
John Krasinski
Jack Silva
Max Martini
Mark Geist, 'Oz'
Pablo Schreiber
Kris Paronto, 'Tanto'
Toby Stephens
Glen Doherty, 'Bub'
Dominic Fumusa
John Tiegen, 'Tig'
Matt Letscher
Ambassador

Chris Stevens
David Denman
Dave Benton, 'Boon'
David Costabile
Bob
David Giuntoli
D.S. Scott Wickland
Demetrius Grosse
D.S. Dave Ubben
Alexia Barlier
Sona Jillani
Freddie Stroma
Brit Vayner
David Furr
D.S. Alec

Payman Maadi
Amahl

Dolby Digital
In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Paramount
Pictures UK

Benghazi, Libya, 2012. Ambassador Chris Stevens arrives with a private security detail at a secret American diplomatic compound in the city. His bodyguards believe that he will be safe, but they come under attack from a group of Islamic militants and call for help. Over at the CIA's annexe, the chief tells his team of ex-special forces veterans not to intervene, but they disobey his orders and head to Stevens's compound, which has been set on fire. They manage to save one of Stevens's bodyguards and bring another's body back to the annexe, where they learn that the

ambassador has been taken to a hospital in the city, where he dies. They brace for an attack on the annexe, which comes in waves; over the next several hours, they hold off the militants by shooting at them from the roof. Another company of soldiers arrives from Tripoli, but the militants use mortar shells in the final round of their assault, which destroys part of the annex building and kills two members of the team. Just after dawn, more friendly Libyan ground troops arrive and help the surviving Americans flee to the airport, where they get on a plane back to the US.

Triple 9

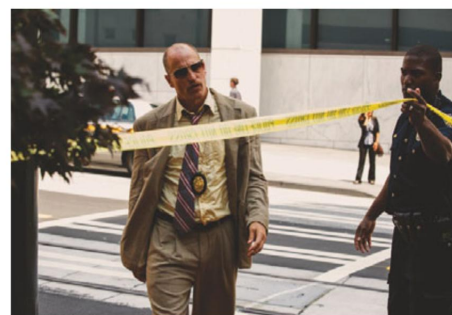
USA 2015
Director: John Hillcoat
Certificate 15 115m 35s

Reviewed by Matthew Taylor

Early on in *Triple 9*, Woody Harrelson's rumpled, booze-sodden detective snorts with mirthless incredulity at the earnest notion of 'making a difference'. Advising his idealistic rookie nephew (Casey Affleck), the beyond-jaded elder merely suggests that the best a cop can possibly hope for is to "out-monster the monster". That bleak assessment chimes with the often harsh, cutthroat landscapes of director John Hillcoat's feature work, from his debut *Ghosts... of the Civil Dead* (1988) through to outback western *The Proposition* (2005) and the adaptation of Cormac McCarthy's post-apocalyptic odyssey *The Road* (2009). The tar-black *Triple 9*, a hectic, lurid crime thriller, proves no exception. But in its full-throttle pacing and vaguely knowing pulp sensibility, it's also something of a departure compared to the grim yet unhurried gaits of Hillcoat's previous films.

One difference is immediately clear: *Triple 9* marks the first time that Hillcoat has done without the sonic collaboration of compatriot Nick Cave. In place of the latter's music is a surging electronic score – by Atticus and Leopold Ross, Bobby Krlic and Claudia Sarne – which adds real urgency throughout, not least during a frenetic opening bank heist that results, à la Michael Mann's *Heat*, in a thunderous freeway shootout with heavy weaponry.

Harrelson's 'monsters' here are a crew of dirty cops led by an ex-Blackwater operative (Chiwetel Ejiofor) reluctantly in hock to the Russian mob. Forced by Kate Winslet's glacial queen bee into taking on a further, seemingly impossible robbery – the retrieval of classified files from a hi-tech NSA facility – the gang consider orchestrating the simultaneous murder of a fellow cop (in police lingo, the 'triple nine' of the title), thus drawing attention away from the heist. As the new partner of the crooked Marcus (Anthony Mackie), Affleck's cocky greenhorn is selected as the ideal target. Marcus's grudging respect for his mark – and the uncertainty this causes – is just one of the



Beyond the line: Woody Harrelson

many twists of Matt Cook's script, which piles on coincidences at an increasingly absurd rate.

Hillcoat has often excelled at rendering immersive, atmospheric environments populated by violent, morally challenged characters – the bleak prison in *Ghosts...*, *The Road's* eerie nuclear winter, Prohibition-era Virginia in *Lawless* (2012). In *Triple 9*, he presents a clammy, gaudy vision of Atlanta, peppered with grisly and eccentric visual details. The film is punctuated by some visceral action sequences, the most impressive of which isn't the big heist itself but an initially unrelated raid on a housing project that transforms the area into a war zone.

While there's much that's familiar about these characters, a strong cast helps elevate the material: Ejiofor does solid work as a man fallen from grace who's both ruthless and haunted by his own brutal instincts; Harrelson reprises his volatile lawman from 2011's *Rampart* to entertaining effect; and Winslet relishes her brief screen time, even though, as written, her preening mob matriarch verges on high camp.

The tension wrung out of the build towards the parallel heist/hit dissipates following the main events, but this latter section is worth the trouble for a late freeze frame on Harrelson's face. His wry grimace seems to say, concerning the monstrous, "I told you so." **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Richard Gere
Lawrence Inglee
Caroline Kaplan
Edward Walton

Producers

Miranda Bailey
Bill Pohl
Oren Moverman

Screenplay

Oren Moverman

Story

Jeffrey Caine

Director of

Photography

Bobby Bukowski

Editor

Alex Hall

Production

Designer

Kelly McGehee

Sound Mixer

Felix Andrew

Costume Designer

Catherine George

©Time Out of
Mind Inc.

Production

Companies

A Gere Productions

film

A Blackbird

production

in association

with Cold Iron

Pictures, River Road

Entertainment and

QED International

Production financing

provided by Cold

Iron Pictures, LLC

and River Road

Entertainment, LLC

Executive

Producers

Mohammed Al Turki

Zak Tucker

Amanda Marshall

Eva Maria Daniels

Cast

Richard Gere

George

Ben Vereen

Dixon

Jena Malone

Maggie

Kyra Sedgwick

Karen, fake Sheila

Jeremy Strong

Jack

Yul Vazquez

Raoul

Michael Kenneth

Williams

Mike

Steve Buscemi

Art

Brian d'Arcy James

Mark

Geraldine Hughes

Maire

Colman Domingo

Mr Oyello

Danielle Brooks

receptionist

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Altitude Film

Entertainment

Credits and Synopsis

Producers

Christopher Woodrow

Anthony Katagas

Marc Butan

Keith Redmon

Bard Dorros

John Hillcoat

Written by

Matt Cook

Director of

Photography

Nicolas Karakatsanis

Editor

Dylan Tichenor

Production Designer

Tim Grimes

Music

Atticus Ross

Claudia Sarne

Leopold Ross

Bobby Krlic

Production

Sound Mixer

Jay Meagher

Costume Designer

Margot Wilson

©999 Holdings, LLC

Production

Companies

Sierra Pictures

in association

with Worldview

Entertainment

presents an

Anonymous

Content, MadRiver

Pictures production

in association

with Surefire

Entertainment Capital

A film by John Hillcoat

Executive Producers

Tom Ortenberg

Peter Lawson

Molly Conners

Maria Cestone

Sarah E. Johnson

Kimberly Fox

Isabel Dos Santos

Steve Golin

Paul Green

Cast

Casey Affleck

Chris Allen

Chiwetel Ejiofor

Michael Atwood

Anthony Mackie

Marcus Belmont

Aaron Paul

Gabe Welch

Clifton Collins Jr

Franco Rodriguez

Norman Reedus

Russell Welch

Teresa Palmer

Michelle Allen

Michael K. Williams

Sweet Pea

Gal Gadot

Elena Vlaslov

Woody Harrelson

Jeffrey Allen

Kate Winslet

Irina Vlaslov

Michelle Ang

Trina Ling

Terence Rosemore

Joshua Parks

E. Roger Mitchell

Smith

Igor Komar

Vasilii Vlaslov

Dolby Digital

Colour by

Technicolor

[2.35:1]

Distributor

El Films

Atlanta, US, present day. A crew of corrupt police officers steal a safety deposit box from a bank vault on behalf of incarcerated Russian mobster Vasilii Vlaslov. Afterwards, Vasilii's wife Irina demands that the crew perform a second, seemingly impossible heist – the retrieval of files from a heavily guarded NSA facility. Michael, the outfit's leader, initially refuses but relents when Irina has his colleague Russell killed. Michael's colleague Franco suggests they combine the heist with the simultaneous killing elsewhere of a fellow officer, thus drawing police attention away from the robbery. Repulsed by this idea, Russell's brother Gabe is cut loose. Marcus identifies his new partner Chris, the nephew of investigating detective Jeffrey Allen, as the target. He has second thoughts when Chris impresses during a gangland shootout. Michael orders Gabe to leave town after he tries to warn Chris. While Michael and Franco successfully carry out the heist, Marcus lures Chris to a housing project where a hitman awaits. However, Gabe is there too – he and Marcus kill each other, while Chris kills the hitman. Irina informs Michael that she is holding his son as insurance for completing the job. When Irina betrays Michael at the handover, he kills her by detonating a bomb concealed as a gift for his son. After killing Michael, Franco targets Chris but is shot dead by Jeffrey.

New York, present day. George wakes up in the bathtub of the derelict apartment where he has been illegally squatting, to find that he is being evicted by the building manager. Forced on to the street, he finally finds help at a shelter for the homeless, where he meets Dixon, a talkative former musician who shows him the ropes and becomes his companion. George's alcoholism makes his life chaotic and he gradually loses the few possessions – a decent coat, a suitcase – that linked him with his former life. We learn that, in turmoil following the death of his wife, he abandoned his daughter Maggie when she was a child. Now, though estranged from Maggie, he occasionally watches her through the window of the bar where she works. Struggling against the bureaucracy of the welfare system, George is defeated at every turn, and seems barely interested in his own survival, though he clings to moments of human connection, and is sometimes shown great kindness by strangers. Devastated by the sudden disappearance of Dixon, George approaches Maggie; after at first refusing to help him, she finally seems prepared to give him another chance to redeem himself.

Truth

Director: James Vanderbilt
Certificate 15 125m 27s

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

Hard on the heels of *Spotlight* comes another journalists-as-heroes saga in the grand tradition of *All the President's Men* – even if in this case the final outcome is less hearteningly triumphant. *Truth* is adapted from Mary Mapes's 2005 memoir *Truth and Duty: The Press, the President and the Privilege of Power*, recounting how, even while she was winning a Peabody Award for her report on Abu Ghraib, her career at CBS News was ignominiously terminated. Mapes's friend and colleague, veteran news anchor Dan Rather, who also departed the station thanks to the same debacle, has said he's surprised, not that it took ten years for a screen version of the story to appear, but that it got made at all. The wounds, it seems, are still raw: CBS has refused to run ads for the film, on the grounds that it "tries to turn gross errors of journalism and judgement into acts of heroism and martyrdom".

Not surprisingly, given its source – and besides, it makes for a way better story – the film (the directorial debut of *Zodiac* and *White House Down* screenwriter James Vanderbilt) comes down firmly on the side of heroism and martyrdom. We're left in little doubt that the story Mapes and her team were working on – that George W. Bush used his connections to get himself into the Texas Air National Guard during the Vietnam War and then went AWOL for much of his service period – is substantially true; that the blanket discrediting of their report was orchestrated by rightwing sources close to the 'Re-elect the President' campaign; and that Mapes's bosses caved in to corporate pressure from parent company Viacom and failed to support her.

With his script for *Zodiac*, Vanderbilt succeeded in making the painstaking accumulation of petty detail, the sense of gradually homing in on an elusive target, absorbing – but there he had the benefit of David Fincher's prowling, feline sense of pace. Here he attempts the same trick but rarely builds the necessary tension. His own direction is sober and classic to a fault, and the first hour of the film often slows to something



Eye of the storm: Cate Blanchett

near a plod. Only in the second half, once the tables are turned and the investigators themselves become the quarry, does *Truth* start to grip.

Here, as elsewhere in the film, the cast are the redeeming feature, and Vanderbilt secures some fine performances. In particular, Stacy Keach gives a tellingly conflicted performance as Bill Burkett, a former Texas National Guard lieutenant colonel who claims to have the key documents that will prove the case against Bush. Ageing and ill, Burkett is visibly torn between his sense of loyalty to his old outfit and a desire to tell the truth – all tinged with resentment towards the intrusive journalists who've landed him in this dilemma. Meanwhile Robert Redford brings relaxed humour and an instinctive dignitas to the iconic figure of Dan Rather. But the film belongs to Cate Blanchett as Mapes, crowning a run of recent outstanding performances from *Blue Jasmine* to *Carol*. As a woman visibly in love with the job she does, she brings a sense of excitement and professional pride to her scenes at CBS, and her indignation when the shitstorm erupts around her is fuelled by her appalled realisation that the company she's dedicated herself to is about to rat on her.

Last year's *The Best of Enemies* suggested that the 1968 Buckley-Vidal debates paved the way for today's biased and confrontational news reporting on US television. *Truth* shows how, a few decades later, such toxic partisanship had become the prevailing climate. 📺

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Bradley J. Fischer
William Sherak
James Vanderbilt
Brett Ratner
Doug Mankoff
Andrew Spaulding
Written by
James Vanderbilt
Based on the book
Truth and Duty: the Press, the President and the Privilege of Power by Mary Mapes

Director of Photography
Mandy Walker
Edited by
Richard Francis-Bruce
Production Designer
Fiona Crombie
Music
Brian Tyler
Sound Recordist
David Lee
Costume Designer
Amanda Neale

Production Companies
RatPac Entertainment
present in association with Echo Lake Entertainment and Blue Lake Media Fund a Mythology Entertainment production in association with Dirty Films
A film by James Vanderbilt

Executive Producers
Mikkel Bondesen
James Packer
Neil Tabatznik
Steven Silver
Antonia Barnard

Cast
Cate Blanchett
Mary Mapes
Robert Redford
Dan Rather
Tophir Grace

Mike Smith
Elisabeth Moss
Lucy Scott
Bruce Greenwood
Andrew Heyward
Dermot Mulroney
Lawrence Lanpher
Stacy Keach
Lieutenant Colonel Bill Burkett
Dennis Quaid
Lieutenant Colonel Roger Charles
Noni Hazlehurst

Nicki Burkett

In Colour
[2.35:1]

Distributor
Warner Bros. Pictures International (UK)

New York, 2004. Mary Mapes, a senior producer on CBS's '60 Minutes', hears rumours that President George W. Bush, now running for re-election, pulled strings to be drafted into the National Guard during the Vietnam War (thus avoiding combat), and having done so, failed to report for much of his service. She alerts veteran presenter Dan Rather and assembles an investigative team – military consultant Roger Charles, journalism professor Lucy Scott and freelancer Mike Smith. They check the official records, which seem to lend credence to the story, but find no one

ready to confirm it until they contact Bill Burkett, a former Texan National Guard lieutenant colonel, who hands over copies of documents offering evidence that Bush shirked his duty. When CBS broadcasts the story on 8 September, the rightwing media denounces the revelations as partisan lies and the documents as fakes. Mapes and Rather attempt an on-air rebuttal but Burkett admits he's misled them. CBS sets up a supposedly independent panel of investigation. On the day the panel reports, Mapes is sacked. On air, Rather announces his resignation.

Uzumasa Limelight

USA/Japan 2013
Director: Ken Ochiai

Reviewed by Jasper Sharp

As Ealing is to the English, so the name Uzumasa is synonymous with Japan's cinema traditions. Almost exclusively associated with the popular sword-fighting genre known as *chanbara*, the studio was established in the suburbs of Kyoto by Nikkatsu in 1927, before passing hands to the newly formed Toei corporation in 1951. With its production-line levels of output, Toei dominated the genre throughout the 1950s, and over successive decades as these period swashbucklers migrated to the small screen. Since 1975, with ever-decreasing demand for its Edo-period backdrops for filming, Uzumasa has simultaneously functioned as the Toei Uzumasa Eigamura ('Movie Village') theme park.

Los Angeles-based Ken Ochiai's paean to the screen samurai of yesteryear abounds with nostalgia for a bygone studio era of camaraderie, professionalism and efficiency. It is self-consciously old-fashioned, but more in the vein of Yamada Yoji's takes on a traditional Japanese spirit betrayed by wider changing circumstances (*Twilight Samurai*, *The Hidden Blade*) than the more dynamic offerings of the genre's 1950s heyday. Given that *Uzumasa Limelight*'s milieu is the world of contemporary television drama, its low-key approach nevertheless seems fitting.

At the heart of the story is Kamiyama, one of Kyoto's remaining handful of ageing *kirare-yaku* – anonymous supporting performers whose elaborately choreographed fights to the death are dismissed as long past their sell-by date by new broom Kawashima, a failed actor who has manoeuvred himself into an executive position through a convenient marriage to the network president's daughter. When, amid a flood of crocodile tears, Kawashima announces that the plug is to be pulled on its longest-running serial, *The Saga of Edo Zakura*, Kamiyama finds himself put out to pasture working at the studio's movie park, where he suffers such ignominies as posing for photos with the visitors and young boys thwacking at his shins with wooden swords.

Some of the satirical swipes at the mediocrity of Japan's current pop-cultural climate are spot on. "Let's make history!" proclaims Kawashima after announcing the studio's flagship new historical drama for the millennial generation – a CG-enhanced reimagining of the life of 16th-century samurai legend Oda Nobutaka. The older performers find themselves completely left out of the picture, as the lead role instead



Ringling the changes: Yamamoto Chihiro

The Visit An Alien Encounter

Denmark/Austria/Ireland/Finland/Norway/The Netherlands/Sweden 2015

Director: Michael Madsen

Certificate PG 83m 26s

goes to a boy-band idol shipped in from Tokyo, who petulantly rejects the traditional Edo-era shaved pate in favour of a luxuriant kabuki-style wig of glam-rock proportions.

That one is able to forgive the occasional lapses in subtlety (including the shower of cherry blossoms at the coda) is largely due to an astonishing central performance by Fukumoto Seizo as Kamiyama. In his first starring role, this veteran bit-player – hailing from a background much like that of the character he plays – looks, quite appositely, as if he has just stepped out from another era, his gaunt, world-weary demeanour alone enough to mark him as a man who knows his time has passed. It is an often heard sentiment these days that Japanese cinema is not what it used to be, but *Uzumasa Limelight* provides not only a welcome reminder of how good it once was, but just how good it can still be when the right talent is harnessed. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by

Mori Ko

Sano Shohei

Written by

Ono Hiroyuki

Story

Okahara Nobuyuki

Director of

Photography

Chris Freilich

Editor

Suzaki Chieko

Production

Designer

Yoshida Takashi

Music

Toda Nobuko

Production Sound

Hayashi Mototsugu

Costumes

Omoto Takeshi

Koga Hirotsuka

Suzuki Sumiko

©Eleven Arts,

Tottemo Benri

Theatre Company

Production

Companies

An Eleven Arts,

Tottemo Benri

Theatre Company

production

Aproduction of

Eleven Arts, City

of Kyoto Uzumasa

Limelight Partners

Supported by NHK

Enterprises, Inc.

Executive Producer

Kawabata Nobuhisa

Film Extracts

Limelight (1951)

Cast

Fukumoto Seizo

Kamiyama

Yamamoto Chihiro

Iga Satsuki

Goda Masashi

Kawashima

Manda Hisako

Mitsuru

Mine Rantaro

Azuma

Kinoshita Michihiro

Ota

Shibata Yoshiyuki

Matsumoto

Shogen

Kudo Jun

Ichinose Hidekazu

Director Wada

Ishibashi Honoka

Yamazaki

Nakamura Shizuka

Megu

Ebise Hana

Kamiyama Nanako

Honda Hiroto

Naganuma

Kobayashi Nenji

Onoe Seijuro Sr

Matsukata Hiroki

Onoe Seijuro

In Colour

[1.85:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Third Window Films

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

"Have you imagination?" asks lawyer Ernst Fasan in the opening minutes of this documentary. He's addressing a hypothetical alien visitor to our planet, but he might as well be encapsulating the challenge that Danish filmmaker Michael Madsen has set himself in asking a group of real-life representatives of various professions how humankind might react to such a visit.

They respond with impressive seriousness, suggesting that these questions have already been discussed – indeed, the United Nations has its own Office for Outer Space Affairs, whose director Mazlan Othman is one of the film's major contributors. She and UN colleagues Niklas Hedman and Janos Tisovszky are joined by representatives of the law (Fasan), the army (Colonel Paul Beaver), the navy (Lord Boyce), the British government (Vickie Sheriff), Nasa (Christopher McKay), the Seti Institute (Douglas Vakoch), the Committee on Space Research (John Rummel), social psychologist Sheryl Bishop and theologian Jacques Arnaud.

The core problem, however, is that human imagination has its limits. Whereas the popular image of an alien visit is drawn from the fictions of people such as H.G. Wells and Steven Spielberg, the reality may well be different, to a literally unimaginable degree. Nasa's McKay discusses this topic in particular detail, pointing out that all known life has been demonstrated to derive from a single common ancestor and therefore a single genesis. By contrast (and by definition), truly alien life must have sprung from a completely different genesis and may well take a form that we cannot detect either naturally or with our current technology. How can we communicate with something of whose existence we may not even be aware?

With no answers to questions that could hardly be more fundamental, the interviewees fall back on standard operating procedure: setting up controlled perimeters, issuing carefully worded media statements and convening the UN Security Council to ensure global collaboration, prior to dealing with the considerably trickier question of establishing whether this new species is curious, hostile or both. Because no answers are forthcoming here either, much of the film's second



Making contact: John Rummel

half offers a more introspective look at what it means to be 'human', in terms of both biological classification and the creation of 'culture' and 'civilisation' – which, as Vakoch points out, is alarmingly unstable. Similar questions were posed at the time of the creation of the 1977 Voyager space probe, with its onboard message capsule attempting to convey some hint of the civilisation that created it (although not a rounded portrait: Vakoch mentions the absence of images of human-created death and destruction).

As a philosophical essay, this is fascinating. As a film, it's less so, mainly because it consists of little more than talking heads intercut with stock images – tracks along street scenes in ultra-slow motion, military manoeuvres, the corridors of hi-tech establishments and institutions of culture and learning. The use of Johann Strauss II's 'Blue Danube' waltz is an explicit nod to 2001: A Space Odyssey (1968). In fact, Stanley Kubrick's influence is extensively apparent, not least in the recurring image of International Space University professor Chris Welch, clad in a vivid red protective suit as he explores various environments, from complete darkness to a topiary garden (shades of *The Shining*) to a room strewn with cultural artefacts (strongly echoing the conclusion of 2001), in an attempt to imagine what it might be like to enter an alien vessel for the first time. But these images, while aesthetically pleasing, ultimately don't add up to very much – though it could be argued that Madsen was on a hiding to nothing given that he's consciously attempting to depict the undepictable. **S**

Credits and Synopsis

Producer

Lise Lense-Møller

Written by

Michael Madsen

Narration Co-writer

Jesper Bergmann

Director of

Photography

Heikki Färm

Editors

Nathan Nugent

Stefan Sundlöf

Composer

Karsten Fundal

Sound Design

Peter Albrechtsen

©Magic Hour Film,

NGF Geyrhalterfilm,

Venom Film, Mouka

Filmi, Indie Film,

Massproduction

Production

Companies

Magic Hour Film

presents

In co-production with

NGF Geyrhalterfilm,

Venom Film, Mouka

Filmi, Indie Film

With the support of

Danish Film Institute,

Nordisk Film & TV

Fond, Austrian Film

Institute, Vienna Film

Fund, Film Location

Austria (FISA), Land

Niederösterreich,

Bord Scannán

na hÉireann/the

Irish Film Board,

The Finnish Film

Foundation,

Norwegian Film

Institute, MEDIA and

in cooperation with

DR3, VPRO, SVT, YLE

Produced by

Magic Hour Film

Co-financed by

Massproduction

In association with

DR3, YLE, VPRO, SVT

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

Metrodome

Distribution Ltd

A documentary in which representatives of official organisations, including the United Nations, individual governments and the armed forces, plus professionally interested third parties, discuss humankind's preparedness to deal with the aftermath of an alien visit. Without any concrete details, they rely heavily on speculative questions. Why have the aliens come? Will they be hostile? How should the media be handled? Will there be unintended biochemical consequences? Can we have a viable interplanetary legal system? Will the truly alien be comprehensible, even on the level of registering its existence? If the visitors leave with no attempt at communication, what would that signify?

With no easy answers to these questions, the experts discuss more fundamental matters, such as the nature of 'humanity', 'civilisation' and 'culture'. Throughout this discussion, Chris Welch of the International Space University in Strasbourg imagines what it might be like to enter an alien vessel for the first time.

Uzumasa studios, Kyoto, present day. Kamiyama is an ageing 'kirare-yaku' (an extra in samurai dramas specialising in being killed on screen). When the series 'The Saga of Edo Zakura' is cancelled after a 40-year run, Kamiyama and the other cast members drown their sorrows at the bar run by Mitsuru, a former actress from the company's heyday. Later, drunkenly practising his moves alone among the studio's sets, Kamiyama passes out and is awakened by a young actress, Satsuki. Over the ensuing days, Kamiyama fails to win a part in the studio's new detective show, though Satsuki is successful. Eventually Kamiyama lands a role playing a corpse, but after a fracas with the director is relegated to performing sword-fighting moves for the public at the studio's theme park. Satsuki is cast in a new modernised samurai drama starring pop idol Kudo. She asks Kamiyama to train her in traditional stage-fighting techniques. During shooting, her moves impress Kudo and the show's producer. She moves to Tokyo to further her career.

Some years later, Satsuki, now a big star, returns to find that the studio's theme park and training school have closed, leaving the surviving 'kirare-yaku' without jobs. Kamiyama spends his days tending his smallholding. Satsuki pleads with him to join her in one final film, starring alongside the stars of yesteryear.

Wazir

Director: Bejoy Nambiar
Certificate 12A 102m 3s

Reviewed by Naman Ramachandran

In his brief career so far, Bejoy Nambiar has made *Shaitan* (2011) and *David* (2013) – films that are pretty to look at but suffer from incoherence. *Wazir* is no different. The chief culprit here is screenwriter Vidhu Vinod Chopra, also a producer and co-editor, who has been shopping the script around for more than a decade. This tale of an anti-terrorist officer helping a wheelchair-using chess enthusiast to investigate the murder of his daughter is full of twists and turns, all telegraphed. Nambiar also employs the time-honoured Bollywood tradition of explaining the obvious. The dialogue is packed with chess metaphors ('wazir' is the Indian equivalent of the queen), all of which add up to precisely nothing.

The only crumbs of comfort are derived from veteran actor Amitabh Bachchan pitting himself against younger star Farhan Akhtar, except that Bachchan is merely phoning in his patented eccentric elder turns from *The Last Lear* (2007) and *Piku* (2015). There are a couple of well-crafted action sequences but they are not enough to save this turgid enterprise, which wants to be a thriller but isn't. ☹



Amitabh Bachchan, Farhan Akhtar

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Vidhu Vinod Chopra
Written by
Vidhu Vinod Chopra
Abhijat Joshi

Original Story
Vidhu Vinod Chopra
Director of Photography
Sanu John
Varughese

Edited by
Vidhu Vinod Chopra
Abhijat Joshi

Production Designers
Bindiya Chhabria
Nairi
Music Directors
Shantanu Moitra
Ankit Tiwari
Advaita
Prashant Pillai

Gaurav Godkhindi
Sound Designer
Renganaath Ravee
Costumes
Shweta Sharma

Production Companies
Vinod Chopra
Films, Reliance
Entertainment
Executive Producer
Priyesh Kaushik

Cast

Amitabh Bachchan
Omkar Nath Dhar
Farhan Akhtar
Daanish Ali
Aditi Rao Hydari
Ruhana Ali
Neil Nitin Mukesh

Wazir
John Abraham
Superintendent
Manav Kaul
Yazaad Qureshi
Anjum Sharma
Sartaj
Prakash Belawadi
Inspector

In Colour
[2.35:1]
Subtitles

Distributor
Reliance
Entertainment

New Delhi, the present. Anti-terrorist officer Daanish Ali is grieving following his daughter's death at the hands of terrorists. Omkar Nath Dhar, a wheelchair-bound chess enthusiast, contacts Ali for help, as he suspects that his own daughter Nina's death at the home of welfare minister Qureshi was murder and not an accident, though he has no proof. In between playing chess with Dhar, Ali investigates. Meanwhile a mysterious figure named Wazir terrorises Dhar, who is killed in an explosion. Ali eventually uncovers the fact that Qureshi is a terrorist whose real identity was discovered by Nina, leading to her murder. Ali shoots Qureshi dead. It emerges that Wazir was a fiction created by Dhar so that he could trick Ali into helping him.

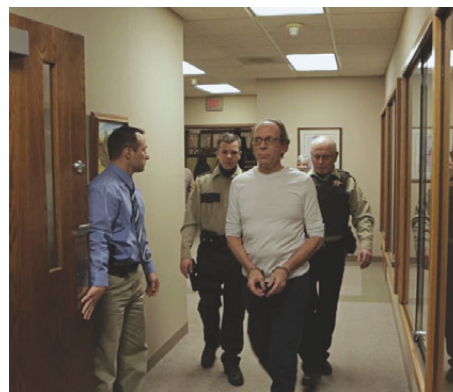
Welcome to Leith

USA 2015
Directors: Michael Beach Nichols, Christopher K. Walker

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

In putting together their documentary *Welcome to Leith*, which sets out white supremacist Craig Cobb's attempt to turn the North Dakota village of Leith into a New Jerusalem for anti-Semites and white separatists, co-directors Michael Beach Nichols and Christopher K. Walker faced a difficult decision. On one hand, by treating the headline-grabbing putsch attempted by Cobb – who is heard to refer to himself as “one of the most famous racists in the world” – and Iraq War veteran Kynan Dutton as an outsized threat, it risks catering to the vainglorious self-image of its subjects, barely capable of caring for themselves, much less administering to a breakaway republic. On the other, by emphasising the disparity between the virile fantasies of white-power rhetoric and the squalid facts, an approach that might belittle Cobb and Dutton's story as a sordid comedy and reimagine Leith as an all-American version of Leonard Wibberley's tiny Duchy of Grand Fenwick, they risk charges of minimising the actual threat to life and limb posed by neo-Nazis, as in the case of 73-year-old Frazier Glenn Miller Jr, a sometime correspondent of Cobb's who in 2014 opened fire at the Overland Park Jewish Community Center, killing three.

Instead of taking any risk that might consequently be misinterpreted, Nichols and Walker steer a course right down the middle, with the expected middling results. Distinguished by a few genuinely discomfiting moments – Dutton and wife encouraging their primary-school-age child to think of words that start with the letter 'N', for example – their film is otherwise a perfectly functional primer on homegrown white supremacist hate groups in the United States, dividing time between Leith's newest arrivals and its longstanding residents, who circle wagons against the incursion. (“Everybody has each other's back,” as Leith mayor Ryan Schock says in the prologue.) Interviews are interspersed with stately Wyeth-esque views of the Midwestern flatland, though the most striking footage in *Welcome to Leith* presumably wasn't shot by either Nichols or Walker: this



Run out of town: *Welcome to Leith*

is lo-res material in the cellphone screen ratio, which shows both Cobb and Dutton at Leith town meetings, tantruming and goading, trying to draw the residents into open aggression and thereby fulfil their fantasies of victimisation and persecution, and in the process revealing themselves in their full sordid trollishness.

Both Cobb and the Dutton family are humanised, as far as it is possible to humanise such troglodytic subjects, given due screen time in which to say their piece against the strong-arm tactics employed by the residents of Leith in running them out of town. No information is permitted, however, that might seriously compromise the film's dichotomy between decent stand-up small-towners and the neo-Nazi beachhead they suddenly find established in their midst, or shake the safe perch from which the viewer is allowed to watch the drama play out. (In so far as a challenge is ever issued to the assumptions of the inscribed liberal audience, it's with regard to gun control, as the threatened residents of Leith see no recourse but to arm themselves for protection against their belligerent new neighbours.)

In total, *Welcome to Leith* offers a close-up look at the face of modern American white-power groups, and it should come as no surprise that it ain't pretty. ☹

Credits and Synopsis

Produced by
Michael Beach
Nichols
Christopher K. Walker
Jenner Furst
Producers
Joey Carey
Joshua Woltermann

Cinematography
Michael Beach
Nichols
Edited by
Christopher K. Walker
Editors
Michael Beach
Nichols

Joshua Woltermann
Original Music
T. Griffin
Field Sound Mixer
Christopher K. Walker

@Welcome to
Leith, LLC

Production Companies
A No Weather film
in association with
The Cinemat and
Sundial Pictures
With support from IFP
Executive

Produced by
Julia Willoughby
Nason
Executive Producer
Stefan Nowicki

In Colour
[1.78:1]

Distributor
Metrodome
Distribution Ltd

A documentary covering events in Leith, North Dakota, between 2012 and 2015. With just 24 residents (including children), the town becomes the focus of national news when the Southern Poverty Law Center, a watchdog group focusing on the activities of neo-Nazis and their ilk, notes that infamous white supremacist Craig Cobb is urging like-minded individuals to join him there. Cobb is buying up plots with the intention that he and prospective followers will take over the town council and turn Leith into a haven for white separatists. Other white supremacists heed Cobb's call, including Iraq War veteran Kynan Dutton and family. Following protests by out-of-town anti-racist groups, tensions escalate between the new arrivals

and longstanding residents, including Leith's lone African-American resident and a father who relocated his family from Oregon after the murder of his eldest daughter. Leith council passes ordinance intended to drive out the white supremacists, and Cobb and Dutton, heavily armed, subsequently 'patrol' the town, before being arrested and charged with multiple counts of terrorising. While Cobb is in prison, the residents of Leith raze several of his properties, and one of his admirers goes on a shooting spree at a Jewish community centre in Kansas City. As the film closes, Cobb has been released on a plea bargain and is making plans for a new white-supremacist haven; the residents of Leith steel themselves for the possibility of his return.

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Home cinema



Conspiracy theorist: Juliet Berto as the young swindler Frédérique, who flirts with strangers in bars and cafés to scam money in Jacques Rivette's *Out 1*

'OUT' IN THE OPEN

Watching this box-set of Jacques Rivette's missing films of the 1970s is like revisiting the golden age of the *nouvelle vague*

THE JACQUES RIVETTE COLLECTION

OUT 1: NOLI ME TANGERE/OUT 1: SPECTRE/DUELLE/NOROÏT/MERRY-GO-ROUND

Jacques Rivette; France 1970–79/1990; Arrow/Region B Blu-ray (both versions of 'Out 1'), Region ABC Blu-ray (the other three features); 776/264/121/135/160 minutes; 1.33:1 (Out 1), 1.85:1; Features: 'The Mysteries of Paris' (2015, 110 minutes), 'Remembering Duellé' (2015, 11 minutes), 'Scenes from a Parallel Life: Interviews with Jacques Rivette' (2008, 52 minutes), 'Rosenbaum on Rivette' (2015, 22 minutes), 200-page book of essays and reprints.

Reviewed by Tony Rayns

The 'missing' Jacques Rivette films of the 1970s – most notably the original and shortened versions of *Out 1* – have been holy grails for cinephile collectors for decades, and Arrow's spectacular set collects the four titles produced by Stéphane Tchaladjieff that were restored by Technicolor/CNC in 1990. As he explains in the documentary

The Mysteries of Paris, included here, Tchaladjieff went bankrupt in the early 1980s (he doesn't say so, but it must have been the post-production of the disastrous *Merry-Go-Round* that broke the camel's back) and lost control of all his past productions: Bresson, Duras and Jacquot films as well as the Rivettes. With help from a banker friend he bought back the films in 1989, and that made possible the restorations in 1990. But that still doesn't explain why the Rivettes have been all but impossible to see for the last 25 years.

The 'myths' surrounding the original *Out 1* are a lot more obscure than the Celtic sun-and-moon mythology that supposedly fed into the planned series *Scenes from the Parallel Life* which followed in the mid-1970s. (Only *Duelle* and *Noroît*, parts 2 and 3, both 1976, were shot before Rivette suffered a nervous breakdown.) This set not only lets us see *Out 1* in its restored, completed and subtitled form but also, thanks to expert contextual work by Robert Fischer in Munich, demystifies the original intentions, the production and the various cuts of the film.

It turns out that the legendary first screening of *Out 1* at an arts centre in Le Havre, over the weekend of 9–10 September 1971, was of an unfinished workprint without titles or credits;

there was not yet a married 16mm print, so it was necessarily a double-head projection with the sound running separately on a magnetic filmstrip. (There were, of course, interruptions when splices broke; the projectionist reportedly did heroic work keeping the whole thing in sync.) The first finished version of the film was 1972's *Out 1: Spectre* (264 mins 11 secs on this set), and the original long version survives only because Tchaladjieff insisted on making a new internegative before Rivette and his editor Nicole Lubtchansky started work on *Spectre*. The long *Out 1* (775 mins 36 secs) was not formally completed until 1990, when German television offered to buy it for screening as a serial; it was then that Rivette began toying with the idea of giving it the Biblical subtitle *Noli Me Tangere* ('Touch Me Not'), used on the packaging here but not on the film itself.

The first surprise is that *Out 1* really is structured as a television serial. It's in eight titled episodes, each with its own opening and closing credits, and each episode opens with a recap of previous ones in black-and-white stills and a reprise of the last shot of the preceding episode, also in black and white: an elegant solution to the 'story so far' problem. The serial was planned

Rivette (right) spells out the directionlessness of pre-68ers in the extended workshop scenes in 'Out 1'



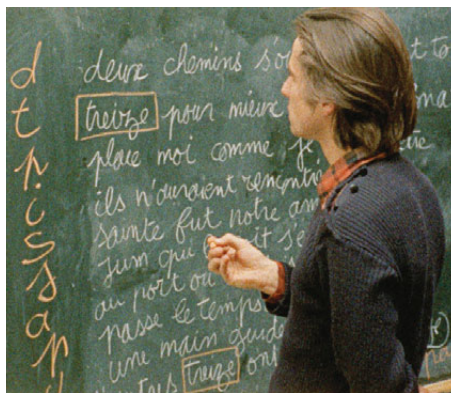
from the start to run around 13 hours because one of its notional inspirations is Balzac's collection of stories *Histoire des treize*, which posits a secret society of 13 socially prominent men who conspire to take control of the France of their day. Eric Rohmer, a Balzac specialist since his days as Maurice Scherer, pops up in Episode 3 as the professor who informs Colin (Jean-Pierre Léaud) about Balzac's interest in secret societies and conspiracies. Anyhow, watching *Out 1* today is not fundamentally different from watching any other box-set of a TV series – certainly no more daunting or intimidating.

Balzac aside, *Out 1* is first and foremost a post-1968 film, imbued throughout with the uncertainties and disappointments felt by a group of Parisian film and theatre people after the May '68 barricades had come down and utopian plans for a drastic reinvention of the film industry had petered out. Rivette admits that the title *Out* was inherited from an earlier project and has no real relevance to this story – but it does represent his own rejection of the quasi-Maoist ravings of some former colleagues, and he apparently did imagine that there'd be an *Out 2* at some point.

His version of 'The 13' (far less sinister than Balzac's) is a loose group of idealistic intellectuals from the worlds of business, culture and the law, some of them married couples, who batted around non-marxist ideas for social change in the mid-60s until the street-fighting of 1968 shut them down. Since then, in the word of the trading magnate Etienne (Jacques Doniol-Valcroze), the group has been "dormant" – and two of its key members, Pierre and Igor, have gone missing. But the film's '13' is essentially a macguffin. We pick up the backstory through hints and casual mentions as the serial goes on, never see Pierre or Igor, and discover only gradually which of the main characters are members.

Rivette spells out the directionlessness of these pre-68ers by focusing at epic length on the workshops and rehearsals of two theatre troupes, both of them groping towards modernist productions of Aeschylus plays, one led by Thomas (Michael Lonsdale), the other by Lili (Michèle Moretti). Late in the day we discover that Thomas and Lili were once a couple, divided by their compulsion to challenge each other about everything, non-stop. It's no surprise that both productions are abandoned before they even start to shape up. The film also brings in two 'outsider' characters, Léaud's Colin and Juliet Berto's Frédérique, hooking both on their sense that the discovery of some vast conspiracy lies within their grasp. Colin, who panhandles in cafés on the Champs-Élysées, pretending to be deaf and mute, is deliberately targeted by the absent Pierre and driven half mad by trying to decode a series of cryptic nonsense messages; Frédérique, who flirts with strangers in bars and cafés to scam money, cigarettes and croissants, stumbles on the secret of 'The 13' when she steals a cache of letters. Things end quite well for one of them, badly for the other.

Rivette explains in interviews here that he was emboldened to make a film of such length by going to a private screening of Jean Rouch's 11-hour workprint of *Petit à Petit* and finding it



Unlucky for some: Jean-Pierre Léaud

wonderful. But *Out 1* seems equally indebted to Andy Warhol's experiments of the mid-60s, the single-take films in which actors and non-actors either improvised or struggled to follow scripts by Ronald Tavel or Chuck Wein. To find interest in watching actors improvise in real time is clearly Warholesque, just as the theme-and-variations structure of the scenes with Berto and Léaud echoes the Warhol idea of taking a 'superstar' and pairing him/her with a succession of strangers to see what sparks fly. Warhol, though, never had a cast of the new wave's most skilful and charismatic actors – nor a cinematographer of the calibre of Pierre-William Glenn, equally capable of giving Rivette extended takes of theatre workshops and footage of social encounters which lends itself to editing. Glenn also gives *Out 1* its Feuillade-serial associations by seeing Paris as a succession of stage sets populated by actors (sometimes in

'Out 1' is a post-1968 film, imbued with the uncertainties and disappointments felt after the barricades had come down



Free association: Thomas (Michael Lonsdale) and his theatre troupe improvise in *Out 1*

disguise) playing characters with plenty to hide.

Contrary to earlier reports, *Out 1: Spectre* is not a radically different film culled from the longer version but a simplified précis of it, more focused on the relationships and on Colin's attempts to unravel the non-existent conspiracy. It loses several sub-plots and many of the theatre-workshop scenes, steps up the cross-cutting, ends differently and uses the black-and-white photos as enigmatic cross-references and visual punctuation marks. It's less evident in *Spectre* that all the original footage was improvised by the actors within the loose and adaptable structure plotted by Rivette and co-director Suzanne Schiffman.

The three mid-70s features in the set will detain no one long. *Duelle* is a pastiche *noir* (hotel night-clerk Hermine Karagheuz and her criminal brother Jean Babilée thwart the machinations of sun-spirit Bulle Ogier and moon-spirit Juliet Berto) in which the *haute couture* and knowingly clunky myth-making predict *le cinéma du look*. *Norvît* is a very tedious mish-mash of Jacobean drama (Geraldine Chaplin performs chunks of Cyril Tourneur's *The Revenger's Tragedy* in English), modern dance and faux-feminist fantasy in the Ulrike Ottinger vein. Both have music performed live on set by visible musicians. And the catastrophic *Merry-Go-Round* (shot mostly in 1977, copyrighted 1979) is an unimaginably long-drawn-out non-thriller about a financial scam, built on Rivette's deluded belief that the likes of Maria Schneider and Joe Dallesandro would be fascinating to watch; it's incidentally the only Dallesandro film in which the actor remains fully clothed throughout.

But it's good that we can see these *films maudits* at last, and Arrow typically offers excellent transfers and very substantial and informative extras. Belatedly exploring the two versions of *Out 1* is like revisiting the golden age of the French New Wave: witty improv, rapturous cinephilia, risky experiments and ideas firing off in all directions. 🍷

New releases

THE APU TRILOGY PATHER PANCHALI/APARAJITO/ APUR SANSA (THE WORLD OF APU)

Satyajit Ray, Bengal 1955/56/59; Criterion/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 NTSC DVD; 125/110/106 minutes; 1.37:1. Features: interviews (Satyajit Ray, Ravi Shankar, Soumitra Chatterjee, Shampa Srivastava, Sharmila Tagore, Soumendu Roy, Ujjal Chakraborty), documentaries ('Making the Apu Trilogy', 'The Creative Person: Satyajit Ray'), restoration demonstration, booklet

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

There's little useful to be said about Satyajit Ray's timeless trilogy (his first two features and his fifth), since it has taken such firm root in the world-cinema canon for six decades that it would take a contrarian of rarechutzpah to suggest its reputation wasn't amply merited. The real story concerning this release isn't so much the films as their miraculous rescue and restoration, to which Criterion has understandably devoted both four booklet pages and a 12-minute documentary.

The films were earmarked for restoration in the early 1990s, and the original camera negatives shipped to Henderson Laboratories in London, where they fell victim to a rare but devastating nitrate fire that also melted original negatives of various British films, including several Ealing Studios classics. Presumably for this reason, the British press coverage was more or less exclusively about those, with the destruction of the original Ray materials receiving far less publicity.

Destruction? Not quite. Although the materials were written off as unsalvageable at the time, they were nonetheless still preserved. Two decades of advances in digital scanning and restoration technology, coupled with some extremely careful handling and chemical treatment of footage rendered alarmingly fragile from the heat of the fire, allowed Criterion and the Immagine Ritrovata laboratory in Bologna to retrieve 40 per cent of *Pather Panchali* and 60 per cent of *Aparajito* from the film that actually passed through Subrata Mitra's camera; the rest (and the whole of *The World of Apu*, whose negative sadly was unusable) came from the highest-quality fine-grain prints and duplicate negatives they could find.

The results are astonishing. Not pristine, of course (Criterion has a sensible policy of recognising that digital retouching should never interfere with the integrity of the original image), but by far the best that these films have looked in decades, and a comparison with Artificial Eye's now 13-year-old DVDs reveals a night-and-day difference. In particular, the restorations bring out the tactility of Mitra's camerawork, the complex interplay of sunlight and shade in the forest, every wrinkle on the face of the octogenarian Chunibala Devi (the aunt in *Pather Panchali*). There used to be a widespread assumption that the state of Indian film preservation (recently explored in Shivendra Singh Dungarpur's documentary *Celluloid Man*) meant there was an upper limit to the quality that could be extracted from these materials, but numerous recent Ray restorations have given the lie to this. *The Apu Trilogy* doesn't necessarily look any better than, say, *Charulata*, but given the greater challenges involved, it's a small miracle that it's at least comparable.

Disc: The presentation of the main features would be reason enough to buy this, but the package is also stacked with other extras: multiple interviews with Ray and his collaborators, new video pieces by Ujjal Chakraborty, Mamoun Hassan and Ray's biographer Andrew Robinson, archive pieces on Ray and Ravi Shankar and a generous 44-page booklet, a quarter of which is given over to Ray's own storyboards for *Pather Panchali*.

BITTER RICE

Giuseppe De Santis; Italy 1949; Criterion Collection/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD; 109 minutes; 1.33:1. Features: 2008 documentary by screenwriter Carlo Lizzani, interview with Lizzani from 2003, theatrical trailer, booklet essay by critic Pasquale Iannone

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Giuseppe De Santis's *Bitter Rice* is one of the pillars of Italian neorealism – and a case study in how flexible the basic tenets of neorealism were, and how easily this post-war revolution could be overtaken, co-opted and internalised by the nascent Italian film industry. De Santis was, with Luchino Visconti, Antonio Pietrangeli and *Bitter Rice* screenwriter Carlo Lizzani, a critic at *Cinema* magazine, the breeding ground of neorealism, and a documentary impulse is visible in many elements of the film.

The story is grounded in a real phenomenon, the yearly migration of women to the Po Valley rice fields for seasonal labour. The locations were found rather than constructed, and the cast is filled out with the kind of homely faces that most certainly don't belong to models commuting to set from Trastevere. In almost every other respect, however, De Santis's treatment of the story of a young woman (Doris Dowling) who, hiding from the law among the labourers, falls in with gum-snapping bombshell Silvana (Silvana Mangano), is very far from the contemporary set of aesthetic and narrative decisions connoting 'realism'. The painstakingly engineered near-360-degree scene-setting pan around the Turin train station that opens the film is just one of De Santis and DP Otello Martelli's many flamboyant camera gestures. In fact, with Silvana's hip-swaying boogie-woogie dance sessions with Vittorio Gassman's *homme fatale*, the storytelling choruses that ring out to pass news and swap insults around the rice fields and De Santis's precise tempo of gesture and cutting, *Bitter Rice* at times



Saved from the fire: *The World of Apu*

seems awfully close to what is often regarded as the most artificial of genres, the movie musical.

The film's breakout star, Mangano, introduced insouciantly shaking her assets, would soon be married to 29-year-old producer Dino De Laurentiis, who only a decade later was building a studio and an empire of his own – after neorealism, born of poverty, had long since become a victim of 'Il Boom' success.

Disc: There are a few rough patches attributable to frames missing on the original element, but overall this is an excellent transfer that achieves high clarity without sacrificing grain. Lizzani's 53-minute documentary on Giuseppe De Santis offers a helpful abridged education in the director's career, with insights into the particularly 'epic' drive of his filmmaking.

GHOST STORY

John Irvin; USA 1981; Second Sight/Region B Blu-ray/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 18; 111 minutes; 1.85:1. Features: audio commentary, video interviews, trailer

Reviewed by Kim Newman

Peter Straub's *Ghost Story* was one of horror's breakthrough bestsellers, easily on a par with Ira Levin's *Rosemary's Baby*, William Peter Blatty's *The Exorcist* or Stephen King's *The Shining* – but John Irvin's adaptation of this complicated novel remains a frustrating sketch of material that might have been better suited to a TV miniseries. It's also a prime example of big studio horror at the post-*Heaven's Gate* point, when visionary filmmakers were being overruled by studio committees.

A superb veteran cast (Fred Astaire, Melvyn Douglas, John Houseman, Douglas Fairbanks Jr – all bringing considerable skills to bear) play Straub's Chowder Society, a clutch of New England old-timers who swap spooky tales as they try to forget the youthful crime that haunts them still; Alice Krige is an eerie presence as the very physical spectre who haunts these aged relics. However, screenwriter Lawrence D. Cohen, who had pulled off the very tricky task of scripting King's *Carrie* for Brian De Palma, doesn't extract a strong enough story from Straub's small-town mosaic. Irvin – suffering from studio pressure – is torn between the separate disciplines of ghost and horror story, and fumbles the rotting spook scares while never quite delivering the wintery chill that ought to envelop the film.

Famously, Irvin rejected startling and innovative Dick Smith makeup designs for the apparitions (later used for the remake of *House on Haunted Hill*) in favour of a bog-standard slimy skeleton that isn't even particularly well used. A lengthy flashback sequence that explains the mystery serves to stop the film dead just as it ought to be turning the screws most tightly, though this section highlights how much influence Irvin's hardly heralded movie had on much later Asian films about drowned and vindictive ghost women.

Disc: The transfer shows off the film's great look and the fine work of much of the cast, but also highlights a few effects and editing lapses. Featurettes with Straub, Krige, Cohen and producer Burt Weissbourd are interesting about the genesis of the project, and Irvin's commentary offers useful footnotes,



WHEN HARRY MET JULIEN

The films they made together in the 1930s earn Julien Duvivier and his star Harry Baur a place in the cinematic pantheon

JULIEN DUVIVIER IN THE THIRTIES

DAVID GOLDER/*POIL DE CAROTTE*/

LA TÊTE D'UN HOMME/*UN CARNET DE BAL*

France 1930/32/33/37; Criterion/Eclipse/

Region 1 DVD: 95/92/93/130 minutes; 1.33:1

Reviewed by **Ginette Vincendeau**

This new box-set from Criterion contains four feature films made by Julien Duvivier between 1930 and 1937, all featuring the stage and film star Harry Baur. It's a welcome release, which will help give Duvivier his due place in the 1930s cinematic pantheon, together with Jean Renoir, Jacques Feyder, Jean Grémillon and Marcel Carné – at the time he was certainly their equal. Also welcome is the fact that the selection goes beyond recognised classics such as *La Belle Equipe* (1936) and *Pépé le Moko* (1937).

The films first of all show how Duvivier was embedded in the culture of his day, picking popular sources and top collaborators. *David Golder* is a Jewish melodrama based on Irène Némirovsky's bestselling novel; *Poil de carotte* – which Duvivier had already shot in 1925 – was a family drama based on a work by popular writer Jules Renard, while *La Tête d'un homme* is one of the first Georges Simenon screen adaptations. *Un carnet de bal*, often credited as the first French episode film, was an original script written by the cream of French theatrical talent of the time, with sparkling dialogue by Henri Jeanson. The film was a hit, and Duvivier remade it as *Lydia* in 1941 in Hollywood (where he was lured following the success of *Pépé le Moko*).

As well as illustrating Duvivier's versatility with genre, the films confirm his stylistic virtuosity. As we move through the set chronologically, we see the tremendous changes in camerawork, sound and acting that took place in this pivotal decade. *David Golder's* halting soundtrack and slow, hyperbolic performances remind us that it was Duvivier's first sound film. Similarly, in *La Tête d'un homme*, the highly melodramatic Russian actor Valéry Inkijinoff, who plays the killer tracked by Baur's Maigret, is a throwback to silent cinema. These are a world away from the smoothly accomplished *Un carnet de bal*, made only four years later, its episodes linked by Maurice Jaubert's nostalgic 'Grey Waltz'. At the same time the films all display Duvivier's penchant for tilted frames, mobile camera and contrasted lighting, used to best effect in *David Golder* and *La Tête d'un homme* and some episodes in *Un carnet de bal*. Also remarkable are the superimpositions in *Poil de carotte*, showing the young hero 'talking to himself'.

The most striking feature, however, is the films' *noir* quality in moral and emotional terms, placing Duvivier at the heart of the poetic



Ceci est une pipe: Harry Baur as Maigret in *La Tête d'un homme*

realist movement and anticipating his even darker pictures of the post-war period. How could such desperately pessimistic portrayals of French society have been so popular?

David Golder traces the hellish descent into despair of a rich Jewish businessman, preyed upon by grasping wife, selfish daughter and greedy hangers-on. Despite the novel's Jewish authorship, the film toes an uncomfortable line in its deployment of Jewish stereotypes.

In *Poil de carotte*, meanwhile, a child, François Lepic (Robert Lynen), nicknamed for his red hair, is morally and physically abused by his mean, unloving mother (Catherine Fonteney) and indifferent father (Baur). It takes François's two suicide attempts, and the help of a kindly maid, to open Monsieur Lepic's eyes: father and son are lovingly united at the end. Putting aside the misogyny (no such redemption for the wicked mother), the last embrace between them is, with hindsight, heartbreaking for another reason: both actors died at the hands of the Nazis. Baur, wrongly thought to be Jewish, suffered a gruelling incarceration in Germany and died later in Paris, while Lynen was tortured and executed as a member of the Resistance.

La Tête d'un homme deploys *noir* aesthetics for more classic genre purposes, as we follow

We see the tremendous changes in camerawork, sound and acting that took place in this pivotal decade

Baur's brilliantly stolid Maigret through the lower depths of Montparnasse. Particularly remarkable are the reconstruction of the brasserie La Coupole, where artists and jazz musicians mingle with prostitutes and criminals, and the seedy hotel in which the killer, Maigret and the spectator stop everything to listen to the great chanteuse Damia perform a poignant ballad next door ("all is foggy and grey...").

Cranking up the pessimism, *Un carnet de bal* takes middle-aged Christine (Marie Bell) to visit the men she danced with 20 years earlier – played by a stellar cast: Louis Jouvet, Fernandel and Raimu besides Baur among others. They are without exception a disappointment, living sad, sordid or criminal lives, the climax in this respect being Pierre Blanchard as an abortionist in a grubby room overshadowed by the noisy cranes of Marseille's harbour. Seeing the normally distinguished Blanchard in eyepatch and torn jacket wearily lay down his abortion kit in front of Christine (he does not recognise her and thinks she has come for an abortion) takes the breath away. More agreeable is Jouvet's wonderful turn as crooked lawyer 'Monsieur Jo', reciting poetry. And there is throughout the towering presence of Harry Baur. A stage star come relatively late to film, Baur at first can easily seem 'dated'; yet his massive presence, weathered face and ability to range from theatrical bluster to sobriety enable his characters to be surprisingly affecting, even as they are thoroughly unsympathetic.

Altogether, Criterion must be thanked for bringing out one of the missing pieces in the great mosaic of French 1930s cinema. **S**

FILTH AND WISDOM

Too daft for some, too explicit for most – but Curt McDowell's cult curiosity is a riot if you're on the right wavelength

THUNDERCRACK!

Curt McDowell; USA 1975; Synapse Films/Region-free
Blu-ray and NTSC DVD; 160 minutes; 1.37:1; Features: audio interview with Curt McDowell, documentary ('It Came from Kuchar!'), short films ('Boggy Depot', 'Confessions', 'Loads', 'Naughty Words', 'Siamese Twin Pinheads'), interviews (McDowell, Marion Eaton, Mark Ellinger), audition footage, outtakes, deleted sex scenes, trailer (Blu-ray only)

Reviewed by Michael Brooke

A great many Londoners of a certain age remember Curt McDowell's notorious art/trash/porn crossover with genuine fondness. Made in 1975, it became a monthly staple at the legendary Scala Cinema in King's Cross throughout the 1980s and early 1990s, usually double- or triple-billed with similarly *outré* fare by Stephen Sayadian (*Café Flesh*, 1982), Doris Wishman (*Let Me Die a Woman*, 1978) or Edward D. Wood Jr (*Glen or Glenda*, 1953), and attending it became something of a rite of passage for more adventurous cinephiles, who were best advised not to look too closely at what fellow audience members might be doing in neighbouring seats.

Scripted by McDowell's sometime mentor and lover George Kuchar, *Thundercrack!* fuses the delirious melodrama of a Douglas Sirk or Tennessee Williams with a creaky old-dark-house setting (only the hairstyles betray its decade; the black-and-white cinematography and blatantly cardboard exteriors could have come from a 1930s cheapie). The house in question, cheerfully named *Prairie Blossom*, is owned by Gert Hammond (Marion Eaton), who during the course of a long and stormy night ends up offering shelter to a variety of visitors who look as though they might be on their way to a John Waters audition (Waters, unsurprisingly, is a fan). While Gert delivers autobiographical monologues, her guests (including an escaped gorilla) end up having sex with each other for a variety of reasons: desire, recreation or as a bargaining chip. Intriguingly, two characters are named Chandler and Bing, which has led to unconfirmed rumours that Matthew Perry's character in the perennially popular 1990s sitcom *Friends* is a walking *Thundercrack!* reference.

Predictably, from a commercial perspective *Thundercrack!* fell resoundingly between multiple stools – it was too daft for the horror crowd, too overwrought for the drama crowd, and too filthy for just about everyone. The frequent combining of soul-baringly confessional dialogue with the kind of hardcore sex scenes that are normally performed in grunting near-silence seems to have been particularly off-putting, as indeed was McDowell's admirably catholic (if far from Catholic) intermingling of gay, straight and bestial copulation, only the last of which is simulated.

But for those on *Thundercrack!*'s highly individual wavelength, it's an absolute hoot, and this Blu-ray restoration will be a particular revelation to anyone who struggled to make out much of Kuchar's reputedly hilarious dialogue over the Scala's less than state-of-the-art speakers and the film's own poor-quality recording. The very welcome addition of optional English subtitles finally does his contribution full justice, not least because the delivery of his floridly overwritten script varies so wildly. Eaton has the stage-trained chops to convincingly evoke Blanche DuBois in her study of a woman driven sexually demented through loneliness, but many of her colleagues were clearly cast more for their willingness to rise to somewhat different technical challenges.

Until now, *Thundercrack!* has only been available on video courtesy of VHS and VHS-sourced releases of dubious provenance. A 30th-anniversary DVD was announced in 2004, and five years later Synapse Films promised a high-definition restoration for the 35th. It finally emerged late last year, a full 40 years on, but it was well worth the wait. Much of the delay was caused by some considerable restoration challenges. The original negative and magnetic sound recordings vanished decades ago, only five prints were ever struck and only one of them preserved the

In the 1980s and early 1990s 'Thundercrack!' became something of a rite of passage for more adventurous cinephiles

film at its full length. Much projected, it was in less than optimum condition, but footage and frames from the other prints (one of which contained unique material, duly spliced back in) and additional digital restoration has produced some remarkable results. *Thundercrack!* will always look like what it is – an extremely low-budget black-and-white 16mm semi-underground film – but unless the negative turns up it's hard to imagine a better presentation.

The Blu-ray extras are a gold mine. Even those who haven't seen *Thundercrack!* before might be advised to watch Jennifer M. Kroot's hugely entertaining feature-length documentary *It Came from Kuchar* (2009) and the five McDowell shorts beforehand as an exemplary spoiler-free introduction to both filmmakers' inimitable universes. The short films each illuminate a facet of the *Thundercrack!* experience, whether the startlingly candid autobiography of *Confessions* (1971) and *Loads* (1980), the bizarre quasi-musical *Boggy Depot* (1973, the only film even vaguely suitable for sensitive maiden aunts), the giggly playfulness of *Naughty Words* (1974, the words accompanying flashes of considerably naughtier pictures) and the uncomfortably confrontational *The Siamese Twin Pinheads* (1972), satirising both the voyeuristic appeal of the carnival freak show and the sexual prudishness of its audience. Interviews recorded between 1972 and very recently provide specifically *Thundercrack!*-based context, as does a selection of audition footage, outtakes and deleted sex scenes.

In life, McDowell rarely settled for less than an outrageously impressive package, and it's good to see the same principle being so firmly applied here. 



It was a dark and stormy night: *Thundercrack!*

New releases

 including the fascinating titbit that Orson Welles was the first choice for the role taken by his lifelong nemesis John Houseman.

JE T'AIME JE T'AIME

Alain Resnais; France 1968; Kino Lorber/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD; 94 minutes; 1.66:1; Features: audio interview with Alain Resnais, booklet essay by Jonathan Rosenbaum, interview with actor Claude Rich, 'The Meeting of Alain Resnais and Jacques Sternberg' featurette

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Given that his work deals explicitly with memory, it must count as some kind of cheap irony that I can rarely remember the details of Alain Resnais's films – instead of a string of plot points, they remain in the mind as a kind of atmospheric residue, a vague, inchoate feeling.

Je t'aime je t'aime, Resnais's fifth fiction feature, practically begs to be misremembered, mixed up. In place of a straight narrative it offers a mosaic of fleeting memories, vignettes plucked from several years in a man's life, linked by obscure associations of gesture, colour symbolism, texture and theme. Fully a dozen years before his mid-career masterpiece *Mon oncle d'Amérique*, Resnais gives us another lab-rat protagonist, Claude Ridder (Claude Rich), a failed suicide who, because of his indifference to life, is deemed the perfect test subject for a dangerous time-travel experiment. Taken willingly to a facility outside Brussels, Ridder is sealed into a contraption that looks like some huge root vegetable with a velour beanbag interior. His first jump back in time is meant to be only a 60-second journey, but things go haywire and, to borrow from Kurt Vonnegut's roughly contemporary *Slaughterhouse-Five*, Ridder becomes "unstuck in time", reliving his doomed romance with depressive Catrine (Olga Georges-Picot) in non-linear scraps, right up to a tragic ending which, like almost everything we see, is not necessarily to be taken at face value.

Given to seeking collaborators outside the cinephile ghetto, here Resnais was filming a screenplay by the Belgian surrealist writer Jacques Sternberg, with whom the director recollects, in one of the extras included here, bonding over a shared fondness for *New Yorker* cartoonists. The movie is touched throughout with jarring incursions of the uncanny and coy deceit, and benefits greatly from the musicality of Rich's voice – in Resnais's words, "a slightly out-of-tune violin" – occasionally joined by Polish composer Krzysztof Penderecki's choral score.

A puzzle movie with pieces deliberately withheld, *Je t'aime je t'aime* is less a problem to be solved than an experience to sink into, as Ridder fatally luxuriates in a time machine that's both womb and tomb.

Disc: A creditable presentation of the recent restoration by the Eclair Group (image) and L.E. Diapason (sound). A few well-chosen contextualising featurettes include Rich's revelation of a conceptual about-face shortly before shooting, which took him from offscreen to centre-stage, and lucid liner notes by Jonathan Rosenbaum which, in what is unfortunately exceptional practice, dare to voice critical opinions on works that one admires – in this case singling out the casting of Georges-Picot as a liability.



Social insecurity: *Love on the Dole*

LOVE ON THE DOLE

John Baxter; UK 1941; BFI/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate PG; 99 minutes; 1.33:1; Features: 'Our Film' (Harold French, 1942), 'The Call for Arms' (Brian Desmond Hurst, 1940), 'Island People' (Paul Rotha, 1940), booklet

Reviewed by Anna Coatman

"We all want a fresh start," declares Sally Hardcastle (Deborah Kerr), as she prepares to escape the Lancashire slum where she was born and raised. *Love on the Dole* is about fighting for a better future, and though it's set during the Great Depression of the 1930s, it was released two years into World War II – giving its story, and Sally's words in particular, a double resonance.

Based on a successful 1933 novel by an unemployed Salford man, Walter Greenwood, John Baxter's film follows the lives of Sally and her brother Harry (Geoffrey Hibbert) as they struggle to secure work, independence and eventually roofs over their heads. Stuck in Hanky Park, the working-class neighbourhood of a northern industrial town, they each long for a future that is just out of reach. Bright, headstrong Sally hopes to make a home with her fiancé, the socialist campaigner Larry (Clifford Evans); Harry wants to find a place to live for him and his (pregnant) fiancée Helen (Joyce Coward). The siblings catch glimpses of happiness: Larry takes Sally to the countryside and Harry and Helen go on holiday to Blackpool – their eyes light up at the mere mention of the place. But unemployment scuppers all their plans. Ultimately, the film shows, even love is thwarted by poverty.

The BBFC rejected the screenplay twice, considering it too "tragic and sordid" for mass consumption. Eventually, the war changed their minds. People in high places – as high as Winston Churchill – believed that allowing such a film demonstrated Britain's dedication to freedom of expression, while the depiction of ordinary people's resilience was thought to be morale-boosting.

Working-class cinema actors were thin on the ground in the 1940s, which perhaps explains why the accents in this film are so distractingly bad. However, the lead performances – particularly Kerr's – are strong, and the scenes in which the women of the community gather to drink and gossip provide good comic relief (as well as passing the Bechdel test).

Love on the Dole manages to be about real people as much as a political message, using

the former to poignantly illustrate the latter. It's surprising, and depressing, how relevant this message feels even today. In a scene in the dole office, a desperate father is told that his payments have stopped because his employed son is living with him.

Disc: The extras with this BFI release include propaganda shorts from the 1940s elucidating the film's wartime context.

MANDINGO

Richard Fleischer; USA 1975; Olive Films/Region A Blu-ray/Region 1 DVD; 127 minutes; 1.78:1

Reviewed by Nick Pinkerton

Long before I'd ever seen Richard Fleischer's *Mandingo*, I was aware of the fact that the film contained a scene in which James Mason uses a young black boy as an ottoman in order to relieve his rheumatism, per doctor's orders. I had been led to anticipate a seamy slice of slavesploitation, and there are those who admire the movie as camp, though the reason that it works as such is also what makes it such horribly compelling drama – it simply does not blink. The performers – Mason with his stained teeth and his accent something like an Australian Foghorn Leghorn, heavyweight champ Ken Norton with his air of indomitable physical arrogance – do not indicate that they are modern and right-thinking men acting in the roles of the bad old days, but seem well and truly mired in the ignorance of the time depicted.

Save for two trips to New Orleans, *Mandingo* mostly takes place at Falconhurst, a plantation in the Antebellum South some time between the Nat Turner rebellion and the beginning of the Civil War. Norton plays the prize property of Mason's master, who takes an acute interest in breeding – both that of his slaves and of his son Hammond (Perry King), who is married off to a cousin (Susan George), though this doesn't curb his appetite for taking pleasure with his black bed wench (Brenda Sykes). Despite pretensions to culture – the cook is named 'Lucretia Borgia' – these are far from the King Cotton aristocrats of legend. Both whites and blacks at Falconhurst speak deplorable English, suffer under mumbo-jumbo pseudo-science, are prevented from acting on their human impulses by a system that is irreparably inhuman, and try as best they can to avoid facing reality. (The detail of the boy playing footstool sneaking a drink from Mason's toddy is particularly chilling.)

Fleischer is still too often written off as an able journeyman, but with this rare film addressing the American holocaust he made a Hollywood product that could stand beside *The Leopard* (1963) and *Salò, or the 120 Days of Sodom* (1975) as a work of art.

Disc: A basic presentation that has some problems in low-light scenes but brings out the jaundiced colour of Falconhurst's pestilential walls and presents with clarity Maurice Jarre's score, with its aspect of a busted music box.

OFFBEAT

Cliff Owen; UK 1961; Network/Region 2 DVD; 71 minutes; 1.33:1

Reviewed by Neil Mitchell

An undercover assignment to infiltrate and bring down a skilful and meticulously organised team of bank robbers draws an



Television

VISIONS OF CHANGE: THE EVOLUTION OF THE BRITISH TV DOCUMENTARY. VOLUME I: BBC 1952-67

UK 1951-67; BBC/BFI/Region 2 DVD;
Certificate E; 382 minutes; 1.33:1

Reviewed by Robert Hanks

You hear a lot of loose talk these days about what digital culture has done to our ability to concentrate, but the rot set in earlier: you could make a case for the popularisation of the TV remote as the turning-point in the history of human attention spans. One of the most striking aspects of this riveting anthology of documentaries from the first two decades of BBC television is how patient they are, how willing to dwell on a shot, an idea, to give a speaker time to develop a narrative and a tone – so different from the anxious, buttonholing factual television of today, which knows that the audience has a collective finger hovering over the remote and no conscience about using it.

Even the fastest, most playful film here, Ken Russell's *Monitor* film 'Pop Goes the Easel' (1962), measures out its effects: Russell takes a good few minutes just watching his quartet of young Pop artists and their coevals at a party, twisting the night away, lingering over images, setting up quiet gags to return to later. When he does cut fast, zooming in jerks on to details of Peter Phillips's paintings, the rhythm is dictated by the thud and jingle of the pinball machine in Phillips's flat – blonde bombshell girlfriend flipping and nudging while Phillips sits in a corner messing around with a duelling pistol – and the effect is allowed to sink in.

Though the collection's title emphasises change, it's noticeable how far several of the films are invested in a Britain (specifically, an England) seemingly set in amber. Denis Mitchell's pair of films 'Night in the City' (1957), for the series *Eye to Eye*, and *Morning in the Streets* (1959, co-directed with Roy Harris) are filmed in northern cities where children play skipping and singing games in streets where cars are a comparative rarity, where old women in scarves and smocks and old men in flat caps and overcoats reminisce about World War I, where in the evenings everybody gathers in the pub and somebody gets up and sings a music-hall song to the plinking of the piano. Derek Boshier, one of the popsters in Russell's film, takes as the subject of his art American infiltration of British culture; but in these films, as in Philip Donnellan's picture of Black Country life *Joe the Chainsmith* (1958) – Americanisation has not taken hold; and nor has television.

This is what lends the earliest films their particular charm – a tentativeness, a sense that television is an unknown quantity for both the filmmakers and the filmed. That makes for a very different relationship between the camera and the subject: there is none of the self-awareness, the feeling of being participants in a game we're all playing, that you get so often today when 'real people' appear on television. You can see, too, how the ghosts of other artforms linger. The first film here, John Read's *Henry Moore* (1951) has the qualities of a cinema documentary – tonally, formally it could easily have been part



Morning in the Streets Though the collection's title emphasises change, it's noticeable how several of the films are invested in a Britain seemingly set in amber.

of the BFI's earlier compilation *Land of Promise: the British Documentary Movement 1930-1950*, and at times its didactic certainties about the qualities of Moore's sculpture have a whiff of the textbook. The two Mitchell films, based on radio features, are palpably part of the same artistic world as *Under Milk Wood* and Charles Parker and Ewan MacColl's radio ballads, odd, touching mixtures of script and actuality; the affinity with radio shows, too, in the attention Mitchell pays to sound, such as the different qualities of footsteps in the night. *Eye on Research: Test Flight* (1959) is an odd interpolation, a live film, presented by the magnificent Raymond Baxter, observing a supersonic flight by a Fairey Delta 2 jet: we've undoubtedly leapt forward into the late 20th century, but the film technique and ideas about how to explain hard science haven't kept pace and the programme is a mess – a vague pride in national technical achievement anchored only by Baxter's impeccable manners.

It's only with *Between Two Rivers* (1960), an impassioned essay by a young Dennis Potter on the impact of modern life on the Forest of Dean, that you get a strong sense of television standing on its own two feet. In the succession of images and his personal record of mixed feelings of ambition, nostalgia, a shameful mingling of the two, you can see an instinct for television at work – feelings so much of their time, expressed through the medium of the time. 'Pop Goes the Easel' has a similar ease with the intimacy of the new form (I more than half wish

Russell had stuck with the small screen – do any of his cinema films work as well as his best TV work? But it is hard to see how his perfervid imagination survived at the BBC as long as it did). Philip Donnellan's *The Colony* (1964), the lives of Caribbean immigrants in Birmingham, while not so technically assured, is a big advance on the quaintness of *Joe the Chainsmith*, and wildly ahead of its time in its willingness to grant space to unmediated black voices; hard to imagine a modern filmmaker giving so little prominence to women's experience, though.

The last programme on the discs, and in some ways the strangest, is *Dispute* (1967), a pair of films directed by the team of Jack Gold (who would go on to make *The Naked Civil Servant*), Ken Ashton and Paul Watson (who would go on to make *The Family*, among other notable experiments in documentary). The not-quite-fly-on-the-wall technique is interesting, even if the realism is compromised by an over-emphatic voiceover narration; but the startling thing is seeing a world where trade unions had such weight – a side of modern British history that has been almost entirely erased. The programme is so confident of its own relevance, and to know that every assumption it makes about power and the direction of things has been falsified or abandoned.

Given the variety of sources, the discs offer excellent visual quality; given the BBC's record, we should just count ourselves lucky this hasn't all been erased. ☹

New releases

MI5 operative deeper into the London underworld than planned in this minor British B movie from 1961. Seconded to Scotland Yard and given a dead criminal's identity, William Silvester's poker-faced 'lone wolf' agent Layton finds himself compromised by the promise of easy money and seduced by the luminous charms of Mai Zetterling's gangster's widow Ruth Lombard. *Offbeat* is a tale of morality, desire and betrayal penned by future Olivier-winner Peter Barnes, and is chiefly notable for its antihero central figure and affable, somewhat sympathetic criminal classes – characters that, for the period, were not yet regular fixtures in British cinema.

Released as *The Devil Inside* in the US, *Offbeat* was produced with one eye on the lucrative American market, hence the casting of Oakland-born Silvester in the lead role. Making up the film's trio of international headliners was Australian character actor John Meillon in the role of career criminal Johnny Hemick. The relationships based on mutual respect and physical attraction that Layton forms with Hemick and Lombard, respectively, are the crucial factors that drive *Offbeat* towards its conventional yet downbeat resolution.

The first feature of jobbing director Cliff Owen, *Offbeat* is, ultimately, a curiously flat experience, despite a synopsis theoretically promising tension and action. The largely perfunctory realisation of the script does a disservice both to Barnes's work and the solid cast assembled to perform it. **Disc:** A sharp new transfer taken from the film's original elements.

THE QUIET MAN

John Ford; USA 1952; Eureka/Masters of Cinema/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate U; 129 minutes; 1.37:1; Features: video essay by Tag Gallagher, 'The Making of The Quiet Man' documentary, essay booklet

Reviewed by Kate Stables

This loved-and-loathed touchstone of 'Hollywood Irish' cinema was a passion project for John Ford, earned by banking *Rio Grande* first with the penny-wise Republic Pictures, which was suspicious of the cost of a foreign-location "phony arthouse picture".

Ford and screenwriter Frank S. Nugent turned Maurice Walsh's featherweight 1933 short story into a boisterous and nostalgic romantic comedy, in which the American individualism of John Wayne's hero runs up against the ingrained collectivity of the Innisfree villagers. Ford's "celebration... of a folksy, prettified Ireland" (as David Thomson sniffed) has been identified variously as a smuggled indictment of 50s America, a Saturnalian or Shakespearean comedy of misrule, and an examination of traditional Irish customs (Tag Gallagher's video essay on the film as a richly detailed morality play is a standout extra here).

Alongside this cheerful riot of competing readings, however, the film's verdant fairytale setting and glorious Technicolor artifice give the kissing-and-fighting love story theatrical resonance, as Wayne and Maureen O'Hara exchange stolen windblown or rain-soaked embraces.

O'Hara's Mary Kate (who is surely as "impetuous! Homeric!" as her suitor) is a tad



Mean teens: *River's Edge*

short-changed in the otherwise excellent essay booklet, which is predominantly Wayne's world.

Disc: A fabulous transfer. The lush greens (there's a pragmatic explanation for the film's soft pastel palette by DP Winton Hoch in the essays) and sharp detail are impressive.

RIVER'S EDGE

Tim Hunter; USA 1986; MGM/Signal One Entertainment/Region B Blu-ray; Certificate 18; 100 minutes; 1.85:1; Features: audio commentary by Tim Hunter, Richard Linklater introduction, Q&A with Linklater at the Austin Film Society

Reviewed by Anne Billson

Tim Hunter's ripped-from-the-headlines teen drama, set in a dead-end California town and accompanied by a doomy synth score, was greeted by critics as a dirty realist alternative to the perky romantic comedies of John Hughes, though it went straight to video in the UK. Now it feels like a grainy companion piece to the 1987 film of *Less than Zero*, as well as an influence on later teenploitation from the likes of Larry Clark and Harmony Korine.

By the time he made *River's Edge*, Hunter was already shaping up as a downbeat flipside to Hughes, having scripted the teen-rebel drama *Over the Edge* and directed *Tex*, adapted from an S.E. Hinton novel. Neal Jimenez's screenplay took its cue from the real-life 1981 murder of Marcy Renee Conrad by her boyfriend, who afterwards invited high-school classmates to view the corpse. Several days passed before two of them went to the police.

The film begins with the immediate aftermath of the murder, glimpsed from afar by 12-year-old Tim (spooky child actor Joshua Miller, whose aura of an old soul trapped in a pubescent body made him perfect casting for one of the vampires in *Near Dark*). Tim's older brother Matt (Keanu Reeves) is one of the classmates later brought to view the body. It's Matt who finally breaks ranks to alert the authorities, though he seems more interested in making out with Clarissa (Ione Skye) than with justice for their dead friend.

But it's Crispin Glover as Layne, self-styled leader of the gang, who dominates the film with a performance so over-the-top it makes Dennis Hopper (at the time enjoying something of a renaissance thanks to *Blue Velvet* and *Hoosiers*) seem a model of restraint in the role of a paranoid one-legged ex-biker drug dealer whose closest companion is an inflatable sex doll.

The apathetic adolescents from dysfunctional homes fall into line behind Layne simply because he's the only one who makes decisions

(albeit wrong ones), insisting it's their duty to support the killer since he's their friend. Glover's manic posturing divided the critics, but it's his energy that drives the film and lends a welcome streak of anarchic dark comedy to a story that is otherwise unrelentingly grim.

Disc: Director Tim Hunter provides an audio commentary, and Richard Linklater – a great admirer of the film – gives a filmed introduction.

SHERLOCK HOLMES

Arthur Berthelet; USA 1916; Flicker Alley/Region O Blu-ray/Region-free DVD; 116 minutes; Features: archive films, introduction, booklet, image gallery, digital documents

Reviewed by Pamela Hutchinson

For more than a century, the legacy of William Gillette, the stage's definitive Sherlock Holmes, was carried on in the quirks he gave the detective that were then taken up by his successors on the screen. The curved calabash pipe, the deerstalker hat and the phrase "Elementary, my dear fellow" all featured in Gillette's smash-hit Sherlock theatre adaptations and are now as comfortably installed in 21st c as if Mrs Hudson had arranged them there herself. The quirks were all we had, because the filmed record of Gillette's performance was thought to be lost. So 2014's lucky discovery of this 1916 cinema outing for his Sherlock gladdened the hearts of Holmesians everywhere.

In this Essanay production, Gillette's 1,000-plus stage performances as Holmes give his portrayal a weight and nuance befitting the gentleman detective. Whether impatiently toying with explosive chemicals in his home laboratory or facing down Moriarty, Gillette's Holmes commands attention from his furrowed brow to his rigid spine. Capitalising on Gillette's imposing height, it's a performance that outshines his co-stars (members of Gillette's touring company combined with Essanay regulars) and the script too: a slightly creaky thriller comprising elements of a few Arthur Conan Doyle stories, which was chopped into serialised instalments for movie audiences in 1919. But no matter, Sherlock himself is the whole show here. As with more recent screen adaptations, the satisfaction of knowing who done it takes second place to the pleasure of watching the cogs turn behind those imperious temples. And although it may astonish the purists, for this story Gillette sought, and gained, Conan Doyle's approval to give Holmes a romantic happy-ever-after.

The film itself has been crisply restored by the San Francisco Silent Film Festival and the Cinémathèque française, lavishly scored (by Neil Brand, Günter Buchwald and Frank Bockius) and now presented on DVD and Blu-ray with an extensive choice of supporting materials. It's an exemplary presentation of an intriguing picture, of pressing interest to early film scholars and Sherlock enthusiasts alike.

Disc: Presented on DVD and Blu-ray in a glowing 4K transfer of the original 35mm nitrate negative, with a booklet of essays. Extras comprise three more Sherlock Holmes shorts, an introduction by restorer Robert Byrne, archive sound footage of Conan Doyle and Gillette, a script of Gillette's play and a scan of his Essanay contract, as well as promotional materials for the film.

Lost and found

THE SECRET LIFE OF AN AMERICAN WIFE

OVERLOOKED FILMS CURRENTLY UNAVAILABLE ON UK DVD OR BLU-RAY

Made just as the censors were loosening their grip, this comedy of marital manners reflects the new permissiveness of its era

Reviewed by Anne Billson

As expected, the image quality of my VHS copy of *The Secret Life of an American Wife* (1968), taped from the television some 35 years ago, was abysmal: panned and scanned, with a picture that sporadically blacked out while the dialogue carried on regardless. Yet I hadn't reckoned on quite how much of that dialogue had embedded itself in my memory. Sample quotes: "An impeccable white wine", "Ciao baby, cab fare" and "It probably looks a little *schrecklich* out there." For this last line to achieve optimum resonance, however, it needs to be heard in the voice of Walter Matthau.

Ah, Matthau. This was the film that convinced me this shambling comedian with hunched shoulders, sagging torso and the face of a lugubrious bloodhound was sexually desirable. It's possible that his being cast as "the most attractive man in the world" was intended as a gag, but if this was the case it backfired, since immediately after that first viewing I had an erotic dream about him. An erotic dream. About Walter Matthau. Clearly this was the fault of the film.

Matthau's presence is central to *The Secret Life of an American Wife*, but the story is that of Anne Jackson as a Connecticut housewife whose husband is too busy commuting to Manhattan to pay much attention to her. He works in PR, imbibes *Mad Men*-esque quantities of booze and is sensationally "good at lunch". His most important client is Matthau, never named but referred to as "The Big Star" or simply "Him".

The film's highlight, for this viewer, comes early on, with our first glimpse of Him delivering a masterclass in deadpan amid a Fellini-esque whirl of hangers-on, and reacting to a fresh instance of his PR team's failure to cater to his movie-star whims with the impassive drawl, "Why am I, who give so much and ask so little, treated in this cavalier fashion?" Classic Matthau.

From the outset, Jackson addresses the audience directly, voicing her frustrations with her role as a housewife whose needs and desires are subsumed by those of her two children and a husband who barely looks at her. She reminisces nostalgically about pre-marital affairs, winning a creative writing prize, reading Proust in French. "Thirty-four years old and my life is over." She's the very model of Betty Friedan's depressed suburban housewife wrestling with "the problem that has no name".

These soliloquies, delivered by Jackson with enough wit to make you wonder why this smart cookie is being such a doormat, are peppered with flashbacks and fantasy inserts – canoodling with various boyfriends in her youth, or obsessing



Affair of the heart: Walter Matthau and Anne Jackson in *The Secret Life of an American Wife*

It presents the distaff version of the Hollywood sex-comedy template, with added 60s raunch

over her husband's throwaway remark that a neighbour's wife would make "a first-class \$100 call girl", which leads to her repeatedly imagining the woman in question (played by Russ Meyer's third wife, Edy Williams) looking aggressively sexy in a leopard-print bikini.

Reflecting the new permissiveness of 1960s cinema, Jackson's daydreams about being a call girl herself escalate to the point where she actually pretends to be one and cheats on her husband by sleeping with 'Him'. The

film was labelled SMA (Suggested for Mature Audiences) and released only a few months before the increasingly outmoded Motion Picture Production Code was replaced by the MPAA rating system, which would usher in a new era of onscreen explicitness.

This conflation of female sexuality with prostitution, albeit in a Hollywood that had only recently been allowed even to mention the word, is one of the most dated elements in the film. Jackson's wistful sigh that prostitution must be "a glamorous way to make a living – doing something you enjoy and getting paid for it", now seems more naive than risqué, and is probably something only a man could write. All it takes for a woman to retrieve her sense of self-worth, it turns out, is the knowledge that a movie star is willing to sleep with her. In an unconvincing wrap-up, it fixes her marriage too.

Writer-director George Axelrod's first screenwriting credits (adapted from his own stage plays) were for *Phffft* (1954) and *The Seven Year Itch* (1955), and helped establish the Hollywood sex-comedy template whereby a married man would attempt to cheat on his wife with an addle-brained sexpot. *The Secret Life of an American Wife* presents a distaff version, with added 1960s raunch, but even on its release it was a dinosaur, a step backwards from Axelrod's more anarchic directing debut, *Lord Love a Duck* (1966), into the conservative theatrical stylisation of the Hollywood sex farce.

But the film's centrepiece – the bedroom encounter between housewife and movie star – turns out to be unexpectedly touching, with both parties exposing their insecurities and revealing their real selves. The fact that Matthau plays it in ungainly pyjama bottoms and an absurd Beatle-esque mop-top does little to dispel the impression that here, at last, is a man who *understands*. 

WHAT THE PAPERS SAID



'Beautifully controlled direction... It's essentially a wish-fulfilment fantasy... One of its most agreeable aspects is that it manages convincingly to touch on the questions of adultery, sexual anxiety and the pain

of growing older without ever making its characters appear either unsympathetic to the audience or hurtful to one another... What begins as a conventional sex comedy [turns into] a comedy of character, at once witty and compassionate, fantastic and convincing' Jan Dawson
'Monthly Film Bulletin', February 1969

Read



POLITICAL ANIMALS

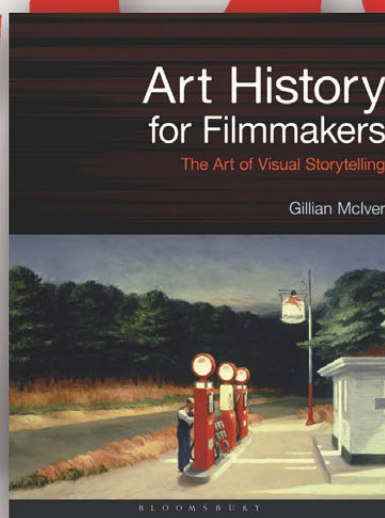
The New Feminist Cinema

By Sophie Mayer, I.B. Tauris, 272pp, paperback, £16.99, ISBN 9781784533724
Female filmmakers are hitting the headlines. The last half-decade or so has witnessed: the first Best Director Academy Award won by a woman; female filmmakers emerging from places such as Iran, South Korea and Kenya; the first stirrings of a 'trans cinema'; and Pussy Riot's documentation of offline activism. *Political Animals* argues that a new wave of courageous and complex feminist cinema is speaking to a new audience hungry for intersectional accounts of women that are missing in the mainstream. It reveals how innovative production and distribution strategies are responding to urgent political situations and tunes in to the transnational, transgenerational conversations that are taking place between filmmakers such as Barbara Hammer, Haifaa al-Mansour and Clio Barnard.
www.ibtauris.com



SLOW CINEMA

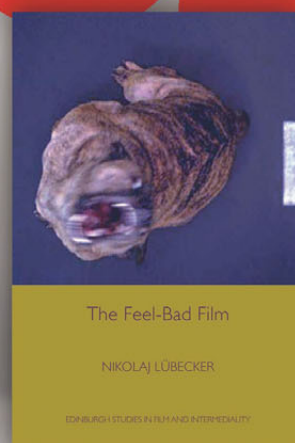
Edited by Tiago de Luca and Nuno Barradas Jorge, Edinburgh University Press, 352pp, paperback, £24.99, ISBN 9780748696048
Deploying the concept of slowness as an umbrella category under which filmmakers and traditions from different historical and geographical backgrounds can fruitfully converge, this innovative collection of essays interrogates and expands the frameworks that have generally informed slow cinema debates. Repositioning the term in a broader theoretical space, the book combines an array of fine-grained studies that provide valuable insight into the notion of slowness in the cinema, while mapping out past and contemporary slow films across the globe. *Slow Cinema* includes detailed studies of films by directors including Béla Tarr, Tsai Ming-liang, Lav Diaz, Kelly Reichardt and Lisandro Alonso, among others.
www.euppublishing.com



ART HISTORY FOR FILMMAKERS

The Art of Visual Storytelling

By Gillian McIver, Bloomsbury, 256pp, paperback, illustrated, £34.99, ISBN 9781472580658
Packed with stunning full-colour art images and film stills, this book is an inspiring guide to how images from art can be used by filmmakers to establish period detail, and to teach composition, colour theory and lighting. By drawing parallels between the work of artists as diverse as Caravaggio, Rembrandt, Renoir, van Gogh and Edward Hopper, and high profile filmmakers such as Martin Scorsese, Guillermo del Toro and Quentin Tarantino, this book presents art history as a repository of images which are all simultaneously available to the contemporary filmmaker.
bit.ly/BPAHFF



THE FEEL-BAD FILM

By Nikolaj Lübecker, Edinburgh University Press, 200pp, paperback, illustrated, £24.99, ISBN 9780748697991

In recent years some of the most innovative European and American art film directors have made films that place the spectator in a position of intense discomfort. Systematically manipulating the viewer, sometimes by withholding information, sometimes through shock or seduction, these films have often been criticised as amoral, nihilistic or politically irresponsible. Analysing films by directors such as Lars von Trier, Gus Van Sant, Claire Denis and Michael Haneke, this book explores why we are attracted to these unpleasurable viewing experiences, what directors believe they can achieve via the feel-bad experience and how we can situate the films in intellectual history.
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Books



Parallel lives: there are some striking similarities between Leni Riefenstahl (left) and Marlene Dietrich, despite their differences over the Third Reich

THE TWO FACES OF GERMANY

DIETRICH & RIEFENSTAHL

Hollywood, Berlin, and a Century in Two Lives

By Karin Wieland, translated by Shelley Frisch, Liveright/W.W. Norton & Co, 624pp, hardback, £22.99, ISBN 9780871403360

Reviewed by Philip Kemp

How important is it that a biographer should like his or her subject? Seemingly it's not essential to the quality of the work, as witness Lucy Hughes-Hallett's magisterial demolition of the Italian writer and political leader Gabriele d'Annunzio (*The Pike*, 2013), or Jonathan Cross's recent study of Stravinsky in which he credits the composer with "anti-Semitism... meanness, cruelty, spitefulness, arrogance, philandering, lying and money-grubbing". At the same time, though, such aversion can make for chilly reading, especially when it appears – as with David Caute's account of director Joseph Losey, or Roger Lewis's life of the novelist Anthony Burgess – that the biographer started out with

a relatively benign attitude and found himself becoming increasingly unsympathetic to his chosen subject as the task progressed.

This pattern – initial affection turning to distaste – isn't the case with Karin Wieland. It's fairly evident from the start that she has no overriding affection for either of the women featured in this dual biography. Her characterisations of them are cool and objective, at times verging on the hostile. But at the same time she plainly finds them both fascinating – for the remarkable similarities between them, and for the no less striking contrasts.

Marlene Dietrich and the director and Nazi propagandist Leni Riefenstahl were both born in Berlin, within a year of each other: Dietrich in December 1901, Riefenstahl in August 1902. At one point they lived in such proximity that each could, if she had wanted, have stared into the other's apartment. (It seems likely, however, that they only met once, not long before Dietrich went to Hollywood in 1930.) Both women grew up fiercely ambitious and independent-minded, and defied an authoritarian parent – Dietrich's mother, Riefenstahl's father – to pursue a

showbiz career that led to roles in silent movies. This independence extended to their personal lives: each married only once (Dietrich at 21, Riefenstahl at 43) and in neither case did the marriage last more than a couple of years in any conventional sense, though Dietrich stayed on friendly terms with her husband, Rudolf Sieber, until his death in 1976. (According to some sources, Riefenstahl married her long-term companion Horst Kettner shortly before her death, though if so Wieland doesn't mention it.)

Both women were highly sexed and notched up an impressive tally of lovers, in neither case evincing the least sense of inhibition or need for secrecy in satisfying her desires. Dietrich's roster of bedfellows is stellar, to say the least: Gary Cooper, Fritz Lang, Jimmy Stewart, Erich Maria Remarque, Maurice Chevalier, Brian Aherne,

At one point Marlene Dietrich and Leni Riefenstahl lived in such proximity that each could have stared into the other's apartment

RE: NATIONAL ARCHIVE (2)

Douglas Fairbanks Jr, Jean Gabin, J.F. Kennedy, Yul Brynner, and of course Josef von Sternberg, her finest director – plus a fair number of women, including Elisabeth Bergner. Riefenstahl's lovers were less world-famous, generally being fellow actors or crew members in her films, but she too went for quality. Harry Sokal, producer of several of her early films and possibly one of her first lovers (though he always denied it), noted, "These partners were always the best in their field: whether they were a producer, director, actor, skier or tennis player, they were unvaryingly the champions; her nymphomania, if we are to call it that, had an elitist bent." Neither Hitler nor Goebbels, it seems, figured on the list, though in Goebbels's case it wasn't for want of trying.

Where Dietrich and Riefenstahl's lives crucially diverge, of course, is over the Third Reich. According to Riefenstahl's memoirs, published in 1987 and treated by Wieland with justified scepticism, until her first meeting with Hitler in 1932 she was completely apolitical and, even after she had become the Führer's favourite and most skilled filmmaker, never joined the Party nor shared his "racial prejudices". This was essentially her defence at her denazification hearings in 1948-49, and it was broadly accepted. And though her directorial career was virtually over, she effectively reinvented herself as a photographer and, widely acclaimed for her studies of the Nuba tribes of East Africa, lived to the age of 101.

By contrast Dietrich, already established in Hollywood by the time Hitler came to power, steadfastly ignored all appeals from Goebbels and his underlings to come back and make movies for the Reich. She spent much of the war in US army uniform, putting on shows for the troops, and as late as 1960, when she visited Germany to give a series of concerts, was still being sniped at as a traitor to her country. By now she too had reinvented herself: her glory years with von Sternberg far behind her, she had largely abandoned screen acting, seemingly with little regret ("I never ever took my career seriously") and toured the world giving concerts until her health began to fail in the late 70s.

Wieland fleshes out her parallel lives with thoroughgoing detail, filling in social and historical background where necessary – especially for the Weimar period, when the careers of both women were being formed. Occasionally she feels the need to underline her aversion to Nazism; in her account of Riefenstahl's *Triumph of the Will* (1935), it seems superfluous to describe the faces of the Party leaders as "puffy, vacuous, disagreeable, sweaty and unsightly". But for all that, and the film's tainted ideology, she concedes the skill of its director, observing that "Riefenstahl's images continue to have a powerful impact to this day". As for Dietrich, though clearly less than impressed with her as an actor even in her von Sternberg heyday (with regard to *The Scarlet Empress* she describes "Dietrich's mechanical working method"), Wieland can't withhold a note of admiration when commenting, "To this day there is no other actress or singer who can wear a tailcoat the way Dietrich could." Well, there are worse epitaphs. ☹

IN THE MOOD FOR LOVE (HUAYANG NIANHUA)

By Tony Rayns, BFI Film Classics, BFI/Palgrave, 96pp, £12.99, ISBN 9781844578740

Reviewed by Ben Walters

Wong Kar Wai's *In the Mood for Love* (2000) is about two neighbours in 1962 Hong Kong – Mrs Chan (Maggie Cheung) and Mr Chow (Tony Leung) – struggling to deal with the realisation that their spouses are having an affair. The film achieved classic status with extraordinary speed: within just a few years of its release, it seemed as if it had always been there. Much of this is surely to do with its elegance and restraint, its buttoned-up yearning punctuated with depth charges of emotional devastation. It traffics in murmured conversations and glancing physical exchanges, quiet hopes, withheld contact and enduring regrets. It is unexuberant. Strange, then, to think that it nearly included scenes of its leads smuggling livefowl into a hotel room and dancing in a pastiche of John Travolta and Uma Thurman in *Pulp Fiction*.

Such test sequences, however, are typical of how Wong works. His idiosyncratic production process leaves an unusually large amount of leeway for major revisions of story, tone and even casting before, during and after the shoot. Tony Rayns gives a valuable overview of this approach in his account of *In the Mood for Love* for the BFI Film Classics series – it's one of numerous ways in which his intimate familiarity with Wong's career benefits this breezy, informative study. Until a falling-out in 2008, Rayns – whose expertise on East Asian cinema is matched by few Western critics – was involved with Wong's work in

Rayns's knowledge of East Asian history and culture allows for enriching contextualisation of the film's portrayal of everyday life

several ways. As well as covering it as a journalist, he contributed subtitles and press material for the director's output and had numerous personal conversations with Wong and his collaborators.

So Rayns is confident here in laying out the film's unpredictable evolution, notably its origins as part of a planned feature called *Summer in Beijing* that was to be a lighthearted love letter to mainland China. There's valuable insight too on the indirect influence of the writer Liu Yi-Chang, whose words survive as onscreen quotations even though the specific story that initially inspired Wong can no longer be discerned in the film. And the pedigree of the soundtrack's signature waltz is usefully unpacked. Rayns's familiarity also allows him to tease out intertextual connections between *In the Mood for Love* and other Wong works, such as *Days of Being Wild* (1990). And his deep knowledge of East Asian history and culture allows for enriching contextualisation of the film's portrayal of everyday life, touching on everything from the period significance of noodle stands to the class implications of Mrs Chan's unforgettable wardrobe.

Rayns is also attentive to what he calls the film's "distinctive aesthetic... a kind of ostentatiously selective presentation of the action" characterised by "evasions, elisions, exclusions, disjunctions and enigmas" expressed through fragmented chronology, *mise en scène*, decor and more. It's an approach, he rightly concludes, that evokes "the imperfect retrieval of a memory". One would like to have heard more about this – about the film's remarkable grasp of how cinema can imitate the operation of the mind rather than just the eye – and about other things too, such as how Chan and Chow's role-play approximations of their spouses' affair overlaps with the practices of cinema, or how their delicate interaction embodies the complex and shifting politics of the time. But with more than half of the book devoted to *précis* and miscellaneous observations, there's limited space here for sustained critical argument. That's a disappointment, perhaps. But perhaps exclusions and disappointments are fitting ingredients when it comes to *In the Mood for Love*. ☹



Love thy neighbour: Wong Kar Wai's *In the Mood for Love*

L.A. REBELLION

Creating a New Black Cinema

Edited by Allyson Nadia Field, Jan-Christopher Horak and Jacqueline Najuma Stewart; 488pp; hardback, £48.95, ISBN 9780520284678; paperback, £24.95, ISBN 9780520284685

Reviewed by Ashley Clark

L.A. Rebellion: Creating a New Black Cinema is the first book dedicated to the films and filmmakers of the L.A. Rebellion, a kaleidoscopic network of African, Caribbean and African American independent film and video artists who studied, and produced, formally adventurous, politically conscious work at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), from the late 1960s to the early 90s. It is the latest stage in a major ongoing project at UCLA that began in 2009 to search for, and restore, L.A. Rebellion work.

It was once thought that there were only around a dozen filmmakers associated with the scene – it turns out that there were more than 50, and more than 100 titles. So, as well as discussing the work and practices of more well-known names like Charles Burnett (*Killer of Sheep*) and Julie Dash (*Daughters of the Dust*), the book illuminates less vaunted figures, such as Ben Caldwell, Zeinabu irene Davis (sic) and Barbara McCullough, who pioneered experimental approaches, linking cinema and visual arts to community organisations such as Larry Clark's Performing Arts Society of Los Angeles (PASLA) or Caldwell's KAOS Network, which remains active today.

A brief, informative introduction explains how the movement was forged in the volatile aftermath of the Watts riots of 1965, and a climate of anti-Vietnam and black liberation struggles. There follow nine essays on a variety of topics; each blends sharp critical insight with meaty, but never overly detailed textual analysis. There are explorations of the crucial role of black music in the movement and the bruising emotional interiority of the films, hitherto unprecedented in black cinema, as well as a look into why some of the work failed to find an audience – “critical thinkers of the L.A. Rebellion... failed to account for the mass audience's actual cinematic experience, which was primarily using cinema for entertainment in available leisure time,” Chuck Kleinhans argues. Elsewhere, a particular highlight is Jacqueline Najuma Stewart's brilliant essay, “The L.A. Rebellion plays itself”, which explores how the filmmakers represented themselves in their own work as artists, performers and meta-textual commentators.



Lambs to the slaughter: Charles Burnett's *Killer of Sheep* (1977)

The book is rounded off by an entertaining and smartly edited collection of oral histories, in which the filmmakers discuss topics ranging from their early lives and student filmmaking days, to their post-UCLA careers and reflections on the ‘L.A. Rebellion’ moniker itself, which was coined by historian and curator Clyde Taylor in 1986 (Ethiopian-American director Haile Gerima feels that the term excludes Asian, Latino and white contemporaries, and declares himself “not crazy about [it]”). Amid many anecdotal delights in this section, we learn that the late Jamaa Fanaka – whose intense, often lurid work (*Welcome Home Brother Charles, Penitentiary*) was the closest the movement came to overlapping with blaxploitation tropes – was moments from committing an armed robbery with his chum ‘Chunky’, before a chance meeting with

a friendly UCLA receptionist prompted him to sign up for a filmmaking course instead.

Though clearly no fault of the book, the only real downside was my recurring ruefulness at not being able to instantly get access to much of the work so vividly discussed within its pages. Although a number of the films have toured as part of a repertory package – most recently in the UK at London's Tate Modern in April 2015 – only a small handful are available on DVD, with a few shorts, including Caldwell's dizzying, proto-Afrofuturistic *Medea* (1973), also available to view on the UCLA website. (We should be thankful for small mercies, though: an alarming stat has it that only 39 per cent of the initial titles researched by UCLA received distribution of any kind.) The authors note that a complementary DVD teaching set will be sent out to institutions, and one can only hope that in years to come the general public will also be exposed to more and more of this vital output. In the meantime, for anybody interested in further exploring one of the most innovative and complex movements in the history of American cinema, *L.A. Rebellion: Creating a New Black Cinema* is genuinely essential reading. **S**

For anybody interested in one of the most innovative movements in the history of American cinema, this book is essential



Haile Gerima's *Child of Resistance* (1972)



Zeinabu irene Davis's *Cycles* (1989)



Ben Caldwell's *Medea* (1973)



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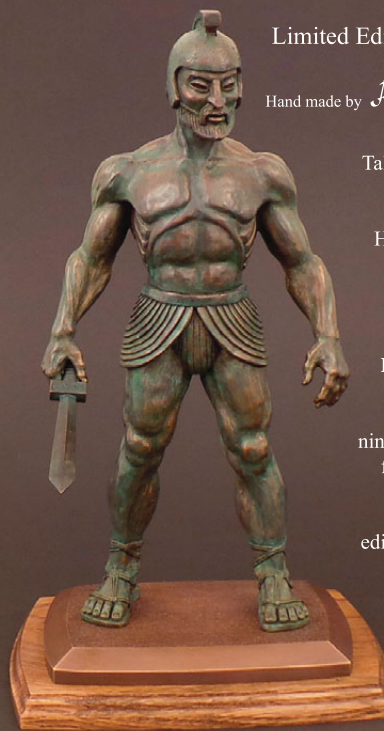
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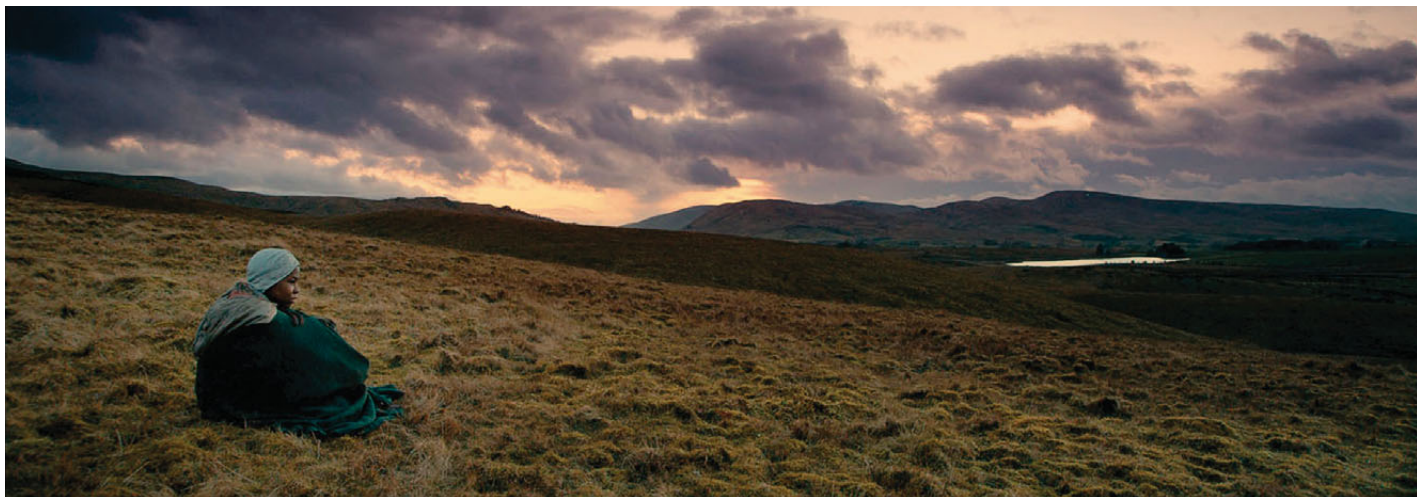
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LANGUAGE PROBLEMS

There are many reasons for the "crushing disappointment" of foreign-language films at the 2015 box-office, including those referred to in your editorial ('Manufacturing consensus', *S&S*, February), but I do not subscribe to the view that it was simply a bad year for foreign-language films.

What your 'Numbers' column highlights in the same issue is a problem for UK cinema culture which has been growing over the past ten years. I say 'cinema culture' pointedly because, as we know, there are now many more platforms where audiences can consume their films. If we value and want a diverse cinema-going culture then something clearly has to change.

More needs to be done on the ground to engage with audiences' appetite for seeing foreign-language films in the cinema. And there is an appetite – trust me, I have first-hand experience! The challenge is to make it add up to a viable business model for distributors and exhibitors. In this regard, your readers might like to know that the Film Audience Network (FAN), working with the BFI, has just launched an initiative to support and amplify the work of distributors locally.

The FAN New Release Strategy is small beer compared with the marketing clout of Hollywood, but there is an energetic UK cinema exhibition community committed to getting world film culture to audiences – in cinemas – and avoiding Mutual Assured Destruction. Watch this space.

Mark Cosgrove *Watershed Cinema curator, Bristol*

QUALITY ASSURANCE

Poor box office for foreign-language films can't be blamed on the quality of available fare. *White God*, *Timbuktu* and *Theeb* were more enthralling than most Hollywood features, but even though critics championed them they were hard to see: *White God* showed in just one cinema in February 2015. Thankfully, its release on DVD will give it long-term life as its reputation accumulates. Is it sacrilege to suggest that the future of many foreign films lies in their discovery via non-theatrical delivery systems?

Christopher Fowler *London*

BATTLE CETACEANS

Nick Pinkerton's review (*S&S*, February) picked up some of the many problems with *In the Heart of the Sea*, in particular those around story-telling. But he missed out the huge, clunking issue of whose story it was supposed to be.

The rural idyll/marital bliss opening sequence, with heroic class-underdog first mate Owen Chase, wrong-footed me right from the start; I even assumed Brendan Gleeson was playing him as an old man. But then, hang on, who's this new young recruit Nickerson in the crew of the *Essex*?

Around Christmas 2013, BBC1 screened *The Whale* – same story, smaller budget; well told and beautifully shot. Great cast, too, though Martin Sheen was underused as the reminiscing Nickerson (I don't remember Herman Melville as an explicit character for him to talk to,

LETTER OF THE MONTH COWGIRLS GET THE BLUES



Black hats off to a fantastic issue of *Sight & Sound* for February. I cannot recall when the film year started off with two such powerful westerns as *The Hateful Eight* and *The Revenant*. Perhaps neither is destined for greatness, but despite their flaws (though these may be integral) they touch and expose many of the still-raw nerves of America's past. They have much in common, particularly the threads of hatred and racism, which they readily foreground as an arena for action and narrative tension. And they are steeped in the conventions of, respectively, the post-Civil War and the Frontier strands of the western genre.

Both have something of a blind spot where women are concerned: in *The Revenant* women are merely something to be fought over and guarded; in *The Hateful Eight* they have a stronger presence, certainly, but their importance is superficial. *The Hateful Eight* sees a number of women brutally slain, and

Jennifer Jason Leigh's character, the leader of an outlaw gang, is principally a punching-bag for the male characters. Surely it would not have strained Tarantino's B movie/spaghetti western rhetoric to include a female bounty hunter (whether black or white)? He did, after all, give us *Jackie Brown*. Once more, Tarantino is challengingly playful with violence, both physical and verbal, and the brilliant long opening shot of an approaching stagecoach in the snow takes place under the shadow of a wayside stone crucifix, its Christianity haunting the rest of the film (and adding one of those rarely seen elements of human topography in the western). But it is *The Revenant* that gives us the most beguiling reversal of genre, through its *The Searchers* sub-plot, in which the Arikara chief searches for and recovers his daughter from her white-trapper kidnappers.

Mark A. Hall *Outer Hebrides*

but that really wasn't the point, any more than it was in the play-acting scenes of Ron Howard's film). John Boyega was in the crew, presumably before he played defecting storm trooper Finn in the new *Star Wars* movie...

Best of all, the cannibalism was suggested rather than depicted – and all the more appalling for it. The bloodiness of the whaling industry in earlier scenes did its work twice over. Time for a re-screening.

Susi Arnott *by email*

NURSE BETTE

I was intrigued by Mark O'Kane's letter ('High plains nanny', *S&S*, February) suggesting that *Shane* might have been an influence on *Mary Poppins*. Several years ago I had a similar thought when writing about *Mary Poppins* in my book *The Best of Disney* (1988). It is curious to think now that Bette Davis was originally considered for the role of P.L. Travers's heroine (and certainly Davis was much closer to the original characterisation than Julie Andrews); and that Davis's last great screen performance was as

an English nanny in the title role of Seth Holt's superb horror movie for Hammer *The Nanny* (1965). When Davis's character is actually referred to as 'Mary Poppins', it is almost like an in-joke.

Neil Sinyard *North Lincolnshire*

CHAPS IN CHAPTERS

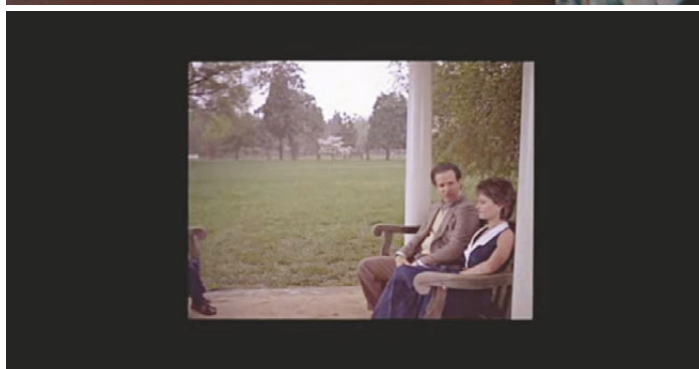
Aficionados of Charters and Caldicott (Books, *S&S*, February) may be interested to know that in *Expo 58*, Jonathan Coe's 2013 novel set during the 1958 World's Fair in Brussels, the duo make fleeting appearances as vaguely mysterious government functionaries, although – presumably for security reasons – they refer to themselves as 'Mr Radford' and 'Mr Wayne'.

Terry Hanstock *Nottingham*

Additions and corrections

February p.69 *Attacking the Devil* Harold Evans and the Last Nazi War Crime 12A, 102m 6s; p.77 *The Hateful Eight* 18, 167m 35s (= 'Multiplex Version' – BBFC); p.60 *Innocence of Memories* Orhan Pamuk's *Museum & Istanbul* 12A, 97m 16s; p.81 *The Last Diamond* 15, 106m 0s; p.83 *Rams* 15, 92m 32s; p.84 *The Revenant* 15, 156m 10s; p.66 *Star Wars Episode VII: The Force Awakens* USA 2015 © Lucasfilm Ltd A Lucasfilm Ltd production A Bad Robot production Based on characters created by George Lucas. Stunt Co-ordinator Rob Inch; p.92 *Youth*, 15, 124m 15

BROADCAST NEWS



It may have dissatisfied some audiences, but the finale of James L. Brooks's media satire stays true to its complicated, smart heroine

By Simran Hans

"*Broadcast News* has an ending that is legendary in being unfulfilling," said writer/director James L. Brooks of his 1987 romantic comedy drama. The film stars Holly Hunter as Jane Craig, a highly capable – and highly strung – television news producer at the centre of a love triangle between her colleague and close friend Aaron Altman (Albert Brooks) and dim-witted but charming anchor Tom Grunick (William Hurt). In the way it captures the high-pressure rush of a working TV newsroom – and the unethical cutting of corners that pressure can encourage – the film is as concerned with the nature of reportage as it is of relationships. It's this clash between professional and personal values that makes the film's extended ending so memorable.

The supposedly "unfulfilling" sequence includes a dramatic tearstained romantic parting between Craig and Grunick at an airport, which perhaps unusually focuses on misconduct of a professional rather than personal nature. The film is interested in what happens when journalistic ambition rubs up against journalistic integrity, letting these themes play out in an extended argument. Furious that Grunick could be cold-hearted enough to fake an emotional reaction on camera in a report on a date rape case, Craig makes no secret of her feelings: "If you're gonna be glib about this, I'm gonna lose it. I was up all night and it made me ill. Working up tears for a news piece cutaway? You could get fired for things like that." Grunick's response – "I got promoted for that" – neatly captures the clash between

traditional journalism's prizing of history and service, and new journalism's preoccupation with shiny surfaces and false sentiment – everything Craig detests and fights against in her working life.

Hurt here is all wet-eyed, wounded masculinity, while Hunter's performance is alive with rage and incredulity in the face of her colleague's breach of ethics. Grunick knows he's crossed a line, but complains, "They keep moving the little sucker, don't they?" His excuse is weak (though Brooks's observation is sharp), signalling a clash of values that's unlikely to be resolved.

And so, Craig leaves the airport terminal and gets in a cab – alone. A flicker of resignation flashes across her face, and she tells the driver to go whichever route he wants to – as if Brooks is suggesting that heartache has softened his hard-nosed heroine, teaching her a lesson in flexibility. But then, something magic happens. After the briefest pause, she tells him, "But New York Avenue's faster." Romantic disappointment hasn't resulted in a loss of her sense of self; she remains the sharp, authoritative news producer with the impulse to direct life around her.

Brooks believed Craig should have the last word, though audiences didn't always agree. In fact, this ending tested so poorly that he decided to reshoot it. In a commentary recorded for the Criterion Collection DVD/Blu-ray release of the film, he recalls being inspired by French filmmaker Claude Lelouch's decision to film the ending of *A Man and a Woman* (1966) without telling Anouk Aimée that her onscreen lover (played by Jean-Louis Trintignant) would

A breakup may seem like a punishment, but in this case it's an act of generosity that allows Jane Craig to keep her integrity

appear in the film's final scene. An actor's director, Brooks planned to deceive Hunter in a similar way, hoping to create space for a spontaneous moment of emotional truth between Hunter and Hurt. When a crew member spoiled the surprise, Brooks was distraught ("I had like 50 seconds where I left the Earth"), but they did the six-minute scene anyway.

In this alternative ending, Grunick gets into the cab with Craig and screams some semblance of a speech that culminates in the thrice-repeated refrain: "You drive me crazy!" The pair kiss passionately before Craig declares that she could fucking kill him – to which Grunick replies: "You sure could." Brooks says he recalls at least one of the leads agreeing that the picture should have ended in that way, but personally remembers "not being able to get there at all".

Who could blame him? While the romantic reconciliation between Craig and Grunick has a pleasing intensity, something about it rings false. The thing that drives them apart is a conflict of values. By putting Craig in that taxi instead of on the plane with Grunick, Brooks proves his commitment to the truth of his complicated, smart, emotional heroine. A breakup may seem like a punishment, but in this case it's an act of generosity that allows Craig to keep her integrity and continue living by her principles.

The film's concluding scene is a kind of epilogue that reunites Craig, Grunick and Altman at a conference seven years later. It's summer and they're outside, but it's raining; the camera swings round, placing Craig at the centre of the frame, showing the shift in advantage between the trio. Both the men are married, Altman with a young son. As for Craig? "There's a guy..." The final shot is an optical (suggested by Saul Bass, who also did the title sequence) that sees Craig and Altman on a bench, the camera slowly zooming out until they appear encased in a TV screen. 📺



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